

SIGHT AND SOUND

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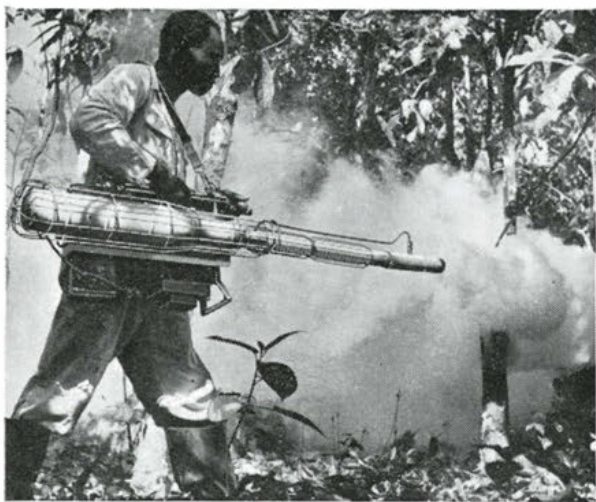
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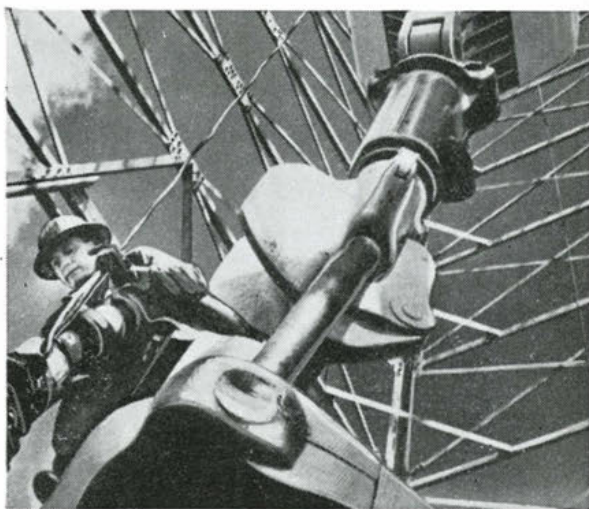
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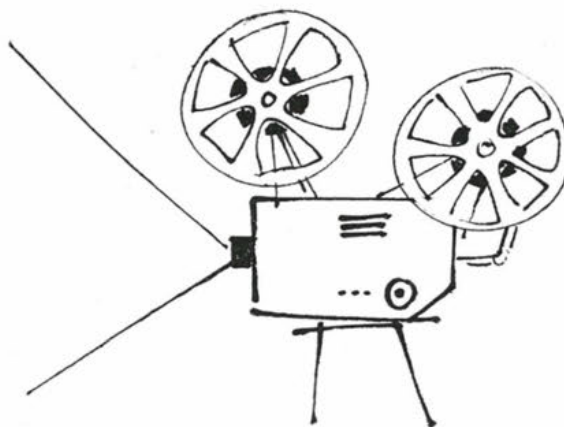
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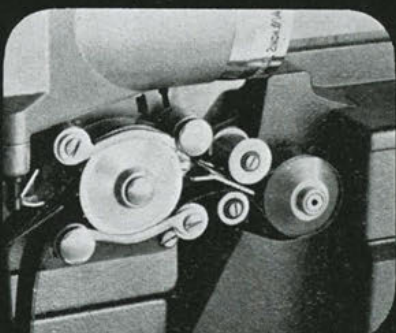
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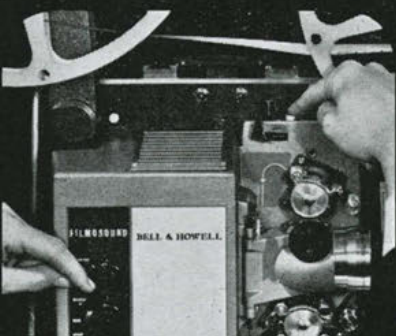
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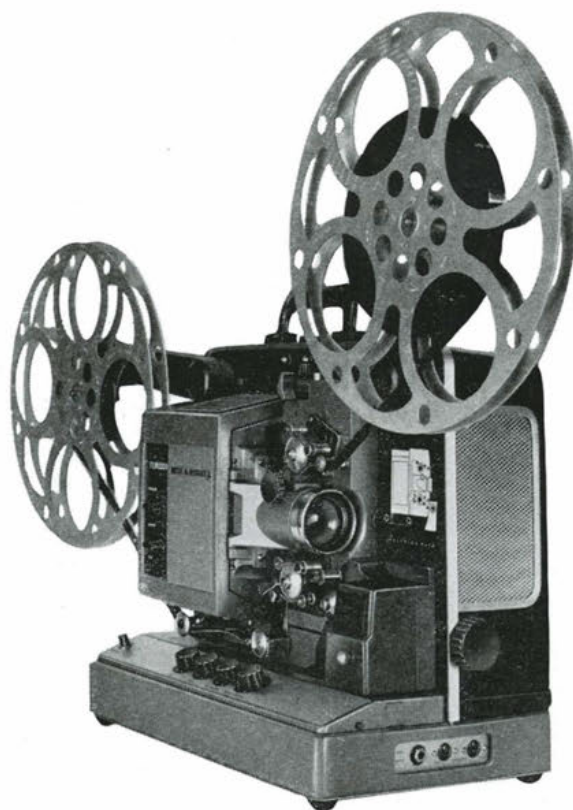
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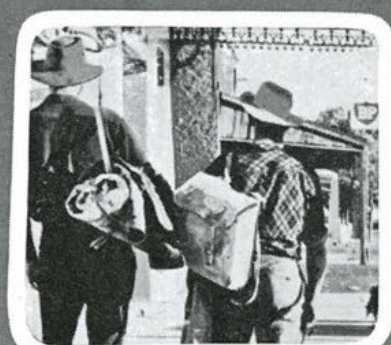
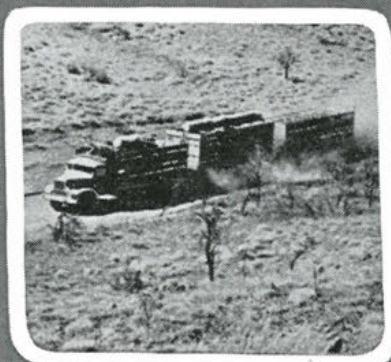
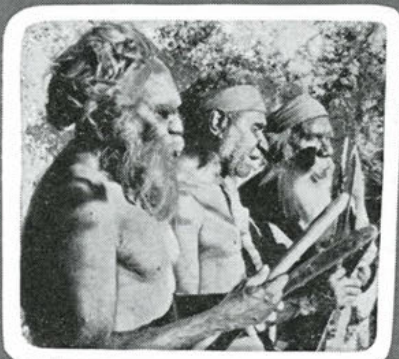
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THE FRONT PAGE

COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE young cinemas of Britain and France are becoming monotonous. We have made them ourselves in SIGHT AND SOUND; John Ardagh and Kenneth Pearson have made them in surveys of the British industry published respectively in *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*; across the Channel the *Cahiers du Cinéma* writers, in this context Gaullists to a man, have made it woundingly apparent that as far as they are concerned Britain's cinema is not yet ready to join Europe. On the grounds of originality and sheer creative volume of work there can be no real argument: by comparison with a cinema headed by Truffaut, Godard, Resnais, Demy, Rivette, etc., we are fielding a second eleven and that is all there is to it. Whether the problem is shortage of talent or shortage of opportunity could be argued indefinitely: we won't find out whether we have the talent until whatever talent we do have gets its opportunity—but, as the French themselves know, evidence of talent must precede commercial investment . . . We can all lose ourselves in chasing around that maze.

For once, however, let us make the comparison the other way around and see what it looks like. Three or four years ago, the French cinema offered unprecedented chances to its young directors. Now, in Paris as elsewhere, it is the blockbusters, headed by *The Longest Day*, which are attracting the big audiences, while a home-grown film like Vadim's *Warrior's Rest* scores the kind of commercial success which eludes a Godard or a Resnais. One of the delusions of the rest of the world is that French audiences are infinitely more sophisticated and intellectually alert than anyone else. Plainly, there is not that much difference, and a minority film remains a minority film anywhere. Television is rapidly catching up on the French cinema, even though there is still nothing to match Britain's TV audience. Cinemas in France, unlike our own, are still weighed down by entertainments tax; and the production strike threatened earlier this year by a group of French producers can probably be regarded as a manoeuvre in the fight to bring home to the government the seriousness of the industry's situation. All the same, an industry hovering on the edge of a strike can hardly be called a happy one. Its policy is bound to be one of commercial caution; its nerve has been shaken.

The New Wave directors are in no sense to blame for all this, except in so far as they have been unable to attract enough solid public support for their films. Four years or so ago, with the first big box-office successes, it looked as though they might achieve it. But circumstances—happily—for a while relieved the pressures which compel most of the world's film-makers to think commercially. Rightly and inevitably, the young directors seized every opportunity open to them to enjoy their freedom, to make films (as Truffaut said of *Tirez sur le Pianiste*) to please themselves. Their achievement is there on the screen. But, in the present state of the French industry, where has that freedom gone to? As our Paris correspondent, Louis Marcorelles, reminds us, even directors

by now as firmly established as Resnais and Godard are being financed in their productions partly from abroad, by companies which are no doubt learning the international value of the art house market when the right name is attached to the picture.

By contrast, Britain's directors have been compelled, all along the line, to think and act as economic realists. There is virtually no professional experimental film-making in Britain because of the ruthless economics of the business, based on the domination of the release system by two circuits and so, in the end, by two men. (The Federation of British Film Makers' submission to the sub-committee set up by the British Films Council drives this point forcibly home.) British film-making at present seems to be influenced by two factors, radically opposed in theory but paradoxically leading in practice to much the same point: a commercial discipline which forces the film-maker to take the audience along with him, and a type of social thinking which accepts this duty because it rejects the élite notions implicit in a minority cinema. When a director such as Lindsay Anderson says, with justifiable satisfaction, that he has made a film for the Odeon, Leicester Square, rather than for the art houses, he is talking the language in which every film-maker in Britain has been conditioned to think.

We should regret this conditioning. We ought particularly to regret that the people who control film-making in this country show so little awareness of *any* world outside the Odeons and have so imposed this attitude on their employees. But, limiting though the disciplining may be, it ought at least to result in film-making which maintains contact with the way the country is thinking. So long as the cinema remains a mass medium, this is important; and it is probably the secret of the Italian success, with an industry which has never disowned its neo-realist inheritance.

A great deal has been heard about a British "breakthrough". Breakthrough to what, we have asked? The clichés of the "Saturday Night of the Long Distance Runner in the L-Shaped Room at the Top" have become everyone's satirical target. And now in Lindsay Anderson's *This Sporting Life*, we have a film which does begin to show us what we are working towards. *This Sporting Life* is immediately and unmistakably in the British style (one would say English, but its director would promptly pull one up), and none the worse for that. It is a narrative style, and in the right hands a strong and flexible one. It is something of our own, and we may be proud of it not least for that reason. We have asked our film-makers often enough why they can't be Antonioni or Olmi, Resnais or Truffaut. The question is still valid, and no doubt we will ask it again. But let us also realise that we have in this country, at this moment, a cinema which commands quite a degree of public support; a cinema which could afford to take a few risks, and might surprise itself by getting away with them; and a cinema which has got to work out its own salvation, in its own way. This looks like the moment for the real breakthrough.

Arrival and



Departure

ROBERT VAS

THE COMPARISON ALMOST OBTRUDES itself: on an early February day in 1956 the terrible mechanical laughter in *O Dreamland* resounded from the South Bank like a trademark of protest for a generation; and on another February day, exactly seven years later, this anger, now given a deeper intensity of expression, found its way to the commercial respectability of the West End. It took seven years of admirable strategic manoeuvring to achieve this transition. In Italy the same kind of process took only a year or two; in France and Poland whole schools have emerged and dissolved since 1956. And now, when we in Britain seem finally to have an audience, producers, actors and writers for this new realism, the appearance of the first really major work is necessarily an arrival as much as a departure. It builds on the achieve-

ments of the last seven years, unifies patterns and points towards directions still unenvisioned.

Paradoxically, in *This Sporting Life* (Rank) Lindsay Anderson is the first to free himself from what seven years ago he was the first to aim at: the direct attack, the deliberate harnessing of poetry to propaganda, which came then as a shot in the arm but which has gradually been left behind by the complexity of life itself, so that it now seems a constricting rather than a liberating attitude. Here Anderson demonstrates that his social consciousness is not, and never really was, a programme: it is the *sine qua non* of the existence of his world. He doesn't need to pull out and dwell on all those now fashionable aspects of

Above: "This Sporting Life": Richard Harris and Rachel Roberts.

English life—the North, the rainy Sunday, the tired face of the Establishment. His world simply exists within this context. Freed from the anxious guidance of a reporter/sociologist director, the characters are encouraged to discover their own feelings as they go along. I cannot recall any British film (perhaps since Jennings) which has thrown itself so courageously and with such hungry intensity into the complicated texture, interaction and social background of human feelings, and which sorts them out in such an exciting process of artistic discovery. In our cinema, where emotions are so often confused with emotionalism, this film never has to underline that it has feelings. It is, simply and naturally, a film of the senses.

It is precisely this adult responsibility which distinguishes *This Sporting Life* from the flustered inconsistencies of, say, the later Woodfall productions. A new kind of subject, especially a socially conscious one aimed at a new audience, must surely demand an added responsibility from the artist. Yet how often in recent years has the British scene been exploited instead of explored, its depressing aspect prettified to make it all seem even more miserable? How often have subjects been taken up and almost simultaneously dropped, as the artist from his new ivory tower gives us his high-angle shot on the Average Man down below? Thoughts and feelings may have been there on the screen—but how often have they survived the next week's general release? How often have they really had the power to disturb?

* * *

THIS SPORTING LIFE begins like a rugby match itself: at once the whole field springs to action. A sudden, subjective shot, like the mysterious pavilion in *Hiroshima mon Amour*, perplexes like a first-minute goal, but gradually fits into the pattern of a subjective flashback technique which dominates the first third of the picture. Formally this is the most complicated and diffuse section; and I will not attempt, as many reviewers did, to approach the essence of the film by way of this technique. I think it should be handled rather as an introduction, an exposition, which establishes the methods of the film and the background to it.

The technique may seem a bit confusing and even alienating. Some flashback scenes (the dance-hall and the subsequent fight; Machin's appearance at the amateur singing contest; all the scenes involving Johnson) may strike a lower level. But in general this device seems the best possible way to establish atmosphere, characters and relationships simultaneously. The first brutal blow on the field where "loudspeakers blare the 'Entrance of the Gladiators,'" or the dressing-room with its "smells of dry dust and sweat, carbolic, a tang of leather and polish," fertilises the heavy soil in which tragedy can later strike root. The rugby playing in itself is never more than an active background to the story, a fitting battlefield for the drama. We are introduced to the close hierarchy of the team and to the wider social hierarchy of the industrial town; to the industrialists, Weaver, for whom his players are his own personal stable, and his tired rival Slomer, whose "old and famous Rolls is parked in the tradesman's drive" when he goes to Weaver's Christmas party. We are given the fullest possible background to Frank Machin's story, his unscrupulous advance to rugby league stardom, but only glimpses of Mrs. Hammond, the widow he lodges with and grows to love. Yet when we reach the heart of the picture, the story of their relationship, we suddenly realise that everything has in fact been prepared for this central section. It is as though the concentrated tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* had grown from the fragmentary technique of, say, *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Frank Machin at the Weavers' Christmas party.

But the flashbacks serve a more important purpose than that of a mere structural device. The critic who dismissed this technique as "old hack, grown weary in Hollywood service" and "the most lucid memories ever evoked at a dentist's, under gas," is betraying his own failure to interpret beyond what is actually on the screen. If the scenes had occurred in a sophisticated French film, no doubt, it would have been a case of deliberate *mise en scène*. But in Britain's industrial North...? In fact, the sudden, subjective glimpses at the beginning, counterpointed by the tough realism of the setting, stir up our interest in the character and encourage us to look out for his interior drama. Our continuity will obviously be a loose one, drawing the "molecules" of the hero's thoughts and emotions into a slowly thickening texture. Everything that happens is going to be seen from his point of view.

Just how consistently this interior quality is present throughout the film (although in different forms) emerges clearly from one scene—in fact the weakest in the entire work—when it is *not* present. This is the evening out at the restaurant, where Machin behaves as he never really would—at least, not at that stage of the story. (In the novel, this scene occurs much earlier.) Here the subjective view is abandoned, and the film takes the standpoint of a detached onlooker. In most British films this would be the natural point of view; but in the context it comes as a puzzling break in the unity of the whole. We must have been *with* Machin if it strikes us so strongly that we are now outside him.

There is, perhaps, yet another break—and this is where the role played by the flashback technique becomes somewhat impure. We were encouraged at the outset to adapt ourselves to an interior style which was consistently carried through until about the middle of the picture. Then, roughly after the Christmas party scene, the subjective narrative rightly changes into a more straightforward one, concentrating on the complex relationship between Frank and Mrs. Hammond. But once this change in style has occurred one may feel that the film itself has only *used* the more formal method of subjectivity, rather like a useful gimmick which can be dropped once it has done its job. Only in the last twenty minutes or so, with the visionary rugby scene in the mud, is the subjective technique taken up again, to fulfil the drama it has introduced.

At its best, however, the "portrait of a man" blends with the "story of a man": interior and at the same time narrative cinema. Among the personal "molecules" of Frank's story





The day in the country: Machin with the Hammond children.

there are plenty of useful reference points for the story to hang on to: the £1,000 cheque; the excursion; the Christmas party. Action and psychological portrait start and attack together, one being used in order to help the other. We approach the story through the interior drama, and soon realise that in fact the interior drama *is* the story. The result is a thick texture, carrying the complexity of life itself, defying us to give a straight answer to the question of what the film is finally about.

* * *

We may approach *This Sporting Life* as a study in human behaviour or, as its creators prefer to call it, in temperament. It certainly offers a key to Frank Machin, the aggressive ex-miner, the glorious gladiator under the grey sky of Wakefield. A helpless giant, always moving, always chewing, to women a "Tarzan", "tiger", "cat" or "performing ape", Machin is imprisoned by his size and strength and demands that his own and others' feelings live up to them. But the world, at least the only woman he needs, "cannot accommodate this sheer greatness." "I was a hero," he says in the novel, "and I was crazy because she seemed the only person in the world who wouldn't admit it." His is the typical fate of tragic heroes who strive to achieve something worthwhile but go about it the wrong way, and cannot help getting into a mess which they are then unable to explain. His real purpose is a frantic search for his own identity. His character may bear a literary, almost intellectual charge in its tragic emphasis, but his best means of expression are his bare fists.

The blow of the fist comes like a visual motif in this film (the novel uses different means), in which emotions and behaviour find their expression in physical terms. It is the blow received during the match which sets off the complicated machinery of subjective remembrance. At the Mecca dance, Machin expresses his helpless jealousy of the footballers through a gratuitous punch. It is a punch which helps him to earn his place in the team. When Mrs. Hammond shows no interest in the £1,000, his response is a blow on the table. Later, he hits her in the cemetery: "I couldn't think why she should say all this, and the shortest way of stopping it I found was to hit her." Force urges the final conflict to its culmination: again a physical outburst. And perhaps this desperate feast for the

fist gives a meaning and motive to that crushing of a spider above Mrs. Hammond's death-bed, which comes, in its context, as a sudden disconcerting recapture of the direct, subjective methods of the opening. This, then, is a culminating blow: a classical hero would consummate his grief in a monologue, but Frank Machin speaks with his fist.

The film-makers' aim was to avoid sociological generalisations, to present a character who is larger than life and for that reason better fitted to stand for a wider, more hazardous poetic truth. "Tragedy is concerned with what is unique," writes Anderson. Archie Rice *The Entertainer*, Colin Smith *the Long Distance Runner* and the original Arthur Seaton of Sillitoe's novel were all unique, larger than life, within their own terms even tragic characters—yet in the films they were not steered towards tragedy. Nor would the original Arthur Machin of David Storey's novel himself reach this height without the emphases of the film's method. True, certain aspects appear to be inferior if one must make comparisons with the book. There Machin's character exists against a livelier background of his affairs with other women, his friendship with Maurice and Judith, his relations with his parents. The written text does more justice to Johnson's character; to the game itself; to Machin's downfall as a member of the team and his gradual re-emergence. Generally, the author's first person singular identification with the hero is more shaded in the novel than in the film, which demands a different and more direct kind of identification from its authors. Here everything takes a compressed and dramatically heightened form. The Machin actually visible on the screen will be much bigger than in the pages of the book; so his behaviour and Mrs. Hammond's reactions assume additional size, a further edge of intensity.

It is Mrs. Hammond's character (seen in contrast with his, and yet from his point of view) which fully brings out the scope of the film. Her strange and silently suffering nobility, her dignified misery, her full-time self-destruction, would make her a perfect Chekhovian character, if her suppression of self were not at the same time so perversely stupid and unnatural. She is a fragile little woman who made bombs during the war, was happy and beautiful in her youthful independence, then staked everything on a single card and lost herself in a marriage which she probably made hell for her husband. When she is left alone, a widow with two small children, she falls into the ready-made role of martyr. "She didn't want to be seen. Her life . . . had been taken up with making herself as small, as negligible as possible. So small she didn't exist. That was her aim. And it was exactly opposite to mine. I wanted the real Mrs. Hammond to come popping out."

The relationship begins to take shape amidst the early flashbacks, and especially in the excursion scene, the only one in which she loosens up a bit. This simple episode, lasting only a few minutes, is a world in itself, full of its creators' search for the essence of their story. The giant dwarfed by the natural surroundings; the quick close-up of Mrs. Hammond against the skeleton ruins of Markham Abbey; Mrs. Hammond catching the white ball against her black coat with innocent, childish surprise; and the unselfconscious games of the children, playing as though released from a prison of whose existence they had been unaware. The texture of the relationship is established by the time it takes over the dominant role in the film and turns it towards tragedy. She is unable to give him the response he demands—"you're so big," she says, "you're so stupid, you don't give me a chance." Although she becomes his mistress she cannot let her feelings go along with it. By then we cannot even judge which does most harm: his aggressive demands or her unnatural renunciation of life. Instead of the best the relationship brings out the worst in both of them. The sense of approaching tragedy is heightened by his inability to put his feelings into words; by the fact that his only way of expression, the physical, is exactly the one by which he alienates her. The *huis clos* feeling of their inability to communicate brings with it the explosion: the violent, final break.

It is at this moment of his "tragic guilt" that the account of the relationship reverts to Frank's personal story, and the picture gains a frightening, almost abstract charge. In the visionary rugby scene the film begins to gather in its own harvest; and this marks the beginning of what is perhaps the most powerful and unashamedly emotional half-hour in the record of British cinema. Here, living up to the size and power of its hero, *This Sporting Life* achieves that universality of tragedy which has so far eluded the new British directors. Here pain is called pain, and the feeling is one of liberation. . .

There is a shot earlier on in the picture which summarises its creators' attitudes: it shows Mrs. Hammond sitting before the fire, talking to Machin about her late husband. First we see her head from behind; her sleek blonde hair in an idealised and youthful romantic vision. Then she suddenly turns into profile, revealing a roughly shaped nose, hollow cheeks, hard features. Here is a pathetic amalgam of the robust and tender, eruptive and suppressed, demanding and accepting—and out of these many contrasts emerges something of the duality of contemporary Britain, the mixture of aggression and withdrawal, anger and passivity.

To some extent this duality was also present in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* or *Look Back in Anger*, though not with such a demanding emotional conviction. The main protest here is not, as one critic holds, a consciously social one: "gladiatorial slaves and suave, unscrupulous tycoons." It lies rather in the heat of the emotions, in an outcry against "not taking things too seriously," being ashamed to feel. To ask for "coolness" and "detachment" (as did another critic) from a film which intends to be and is "hot" seems a very English miscalculation. And through this heat is communicated, in the words of its author—"the whole tragedy of living, of being alive" today, in Britain, in the world. A laconic tragedy, if you like, which begins with the hero breaking his front teeth and ends with him, alone and unhappy, taking out his false teeth before another match.

* * *

To reach this point, Lindsay Anderson had to get rid of a certain kind of facile romanticism which mingles with the genuinely humane in *Every Day Except Christmas*. He emerges as a talent with strong reserves, able to encompass the small psychological glimpses as well as the overall emotional sweep: the exposition of Mrs. Hammond's character; the self-contained entity of a simple shot in which Machin's hand puts the cheque on the table and her hand, instead of reaching out for it, flicks up the handle of her sewing-machine; recognition of physical sensations, like the cold water sprinkled over Machin when he stands in the shower; the use of overlapping sound, handled here with the split-second accuracy that bears the stamp of an artist. There are, of course, a number of scenes which remain below the level of the whole: the dinner; the strip club; the Mecca dance; the card game in the bus; the scene in the Weavers' room at the Christmas party; the doss-house (an untimely return to straight observation at this moment in the film); and perhaps all the scenes involving Johnson, whose character seemed to me too studio-born, by comparison with the novel, to evoke the inexplicable strangeness surrounding him and his mysterious disappearance from the story. The film doesn't do justice, either, to the two children. Their parts are never really developed, perhaps rightly since the film hardly needs them. But then why take them up and then finish them off in such a disturbing and unresolved way with the shot in the hospital corridor?

Although the film knows very well what it is doing, there is no "exciting" cinematic vision here. Anderson and his cameraman use the best of that traditional feature language which serves as the basis for the work. Collectors may by the way recognise possible homages—to Humphrey Jennings ("One Man Went to Mow") and even perhaps to Joan Crawford



"The perfect equivalent of a D. H. Lawrence cinema . . ."

(Mrs. Weaver). All in all, it is not so much a *film d'auteur* as, rather, a film *with* an author.

And with a close team. This is a genuine piece of creative collaboration, not only from Reisz, Anderson and Storey but from every department. Richard Harris seems to build up the character before our eyes, offering different emotional and physical variations on the key theme of "big". Rachel Roberts is one of those rare actresses who can give dignity even to the smallest part, can combine without effort the down-to-earth and the rarefied. Their scenes together, in the shabby, closed room of the house in Fairfax Street, with her dead husband's boots on the hearth, are perhaps the perfect equivalent of a D. H. Lawrence cinema. Colin Blakely's Maurice and Anne Cunningham's Judith seem to be intruders from the lighter world of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, though this may have been deliberately done to emphasise Frank's isolation. Arthur Lowe as Slomer seems a less harsh and more complete performance than Alan Badel's effective Weaver. In her few scenes, Vanda Godsell's smilingly frustrated Mrs. Weaver confidently asserts the lady's own right to use her husband's stable. The economical score by Roberto Gerhard affords a masterly contrast to the giant hero, unostentatiously adding that extra dimension which film music stands for. Denys Coop's camerawork, more deliberate and professionally firm than in *A Kind of Loving*, takes an equal share in the total creative experience of discovery.

With all this there comes an even happier discovery. Can it really be true that a British film, made within the commercial framework, can show such courage in expressing feeling, and such genuine responsibility towards the feelings it expresses? Well, here it is: it has been done. A film which in its outlook on life and people is so very British also achieves a kind of universality. It is an exploratory work, and this involves numerous falterings, mistakes, impurities in style and content. But it is an arrival as much as a departure; a breakthrough perhaps to a more demanding audience, and more courage in production; a password to the unashamed expression of emotion. The main thing is that it is with us. Let's not try to classify it: just be proud of it and never, never take it for granted.

MOVIE & MYTH

Geoffrey
Nowell-
Smith

THERE ARE TWO ENDS from which one can look at any film: what goes in, and what comes out. And since communication is rarely, if ever, perfect between director and audience, what the director puts into the film in the process of creation is not necessarily the same as what the spectator gets out of it. The critic, whose function it is to mediate if he knows how between these points of view, leans now to one side and now to the other, trying to assist the act of communication; but for one reason or another, and it may be connected with the structure of the film industry, or the workings of the human mind, or the nature of communication itself, his efforts are rarely entirely successful. One feels sometimes that the cinema is not really a process of communication at all, but of exchange: you can count the hard cash at the box-office, but there is no knowing what processes are involved when dealing with the imponderables of art.

This article is an attempt indirectly to bridge part of the gap, by looking at some of the myths, recognised or unrecognised as such, that stand in the way of what I take to be the ideal—the direct communication of experience by the cinema. I would not pretend to have solved any fundamental problems (the really fundamental problems are probably radically insoluble anyway). But I do feel something can be achieved by looking critically at the role played in the cinema by the sort of myths I have in mind—if only an admission that the problems do exist.

There is in the first place something about the cinema, about going into those dark, womblike caverns and watching the distant unfolding of dreamlike images on a flickering screen, that makes it at the subconscious level a particularly fertile source of myth in the Jungian sense of the word. Not only the more outrageous images of Vigo, Buñuel or Resnais, which after all are opium only for the intellectuals, but also some of the themes and imagery of the commercial cinema, achieve part if not all of their effect by working on the obscure movements of the unconscious mind. The horror picture works purely on this level, but to coin a phrase, there are vamps as well as vampires. Eva Marie Saint, so blonde, so starved of blood, is a gorgeous vampire in the first half of *North by Northwest*; and when the reversal comes and she becomes the ideal beloved fought for and won, Hitchcock is only liberating the spectator from the possible consequences of his unconscious fantasy. But Hitchcock's mythology can also be seen, as it is by Rohmer and Chabrol, in terms of transcendent ideas whose significance is not psychological but metaphysical, theological even; and there is no doubt that for the purposes of criticism it is useful to be able to objectify the myths in this way. In that case the fantasies of the unconscious

and the processes of projection and identification are treated on the same level as the myths of the consciousness, like the myth of the hero. And since the myths of the consciousness are only guiding ideas, not necessarily directly related to concrete experience, there is a danger that the critical mopping-up operation will distort rather than illuminate the problem of how a film is experienced.

Equally important, for our purposes, is the general tendency to see things under a mythical aspect—using the word "myth" fairly loosely to cover the generalised images or ideas one has of things, ideas which are mythical only in so far as they are a substitute for direct knowledge or experience. In the case of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* most middle-class spectators (and critics) accepted the film as a realistic picture of working-class life, because it fitted in with a vague idea they had of the subject—mythical, of course, but only in the loosest sense of the word. For many working-class spectators, on the other hand, *Saturday Night* was a myth in the narrow sense. Arthur Seaton stood out heroically against his background: he did things, like getting blind drunk when he felt like it, or sleeping with his mate's wife, which morally or materially they were afraid or unable to do, and they identified with him as an ideal, the mythical hero, different from the heroes incarnated by Marlon Brando or Kirk Douglas only in being more local and accessible, a hero of our own place and time.

From the point of view of the out-and-out rationalist it makes little difference, once it is seen we are dealing with myth, what sort of myth this might be—the Great American Myth, the Myth of the Garden, the Myth of Oedipus, the Myth of the Tart-with-a-Heart-of-Gold. The word, in English, is hopelessly pejorative. Myths are lies, the enemies of reason and truth. This attitude is both spoil-sport and confused. There would be a place for myth, of a kind, even in an ideally rational cinema. What we must ask ourselves, like Plato, is which myths are to be admitted and which rejected, but our criteria unlike his will not be moral but logical. It is not a question of which myths are pernicious—State and Volk in *Triumph of the Will*, or in the Soviet cinema, *Nevski*, *Ivan*—but of how the myth operates, as part of the structure of the film as a fable, or only in the spectator's mind as an image. Conceptual distinctions of this kind, forced on us by the ambiguity of the word itself, may help to avoid throwing out the precious creative baby with the critical bath water.

* * *

The language of film is supposed to transcend all purely verbal language barriers. This is just not true, even of the old silent cinema. Alien behaviour can be just as incomprehensible

as alien speech. Whether one likes it or not, foreign films are different, and are differently judged. Europeans who have just "discovered" the American cinema are amused and dismayed at the way educated Americans regard so many of their own native films as ridiculous and solemnly lap up anything made in Europe or further afield, precisely because the foreign films are so alien, both from American movie-convention and from American life. Such an attitude, we feel, is perverse, snobbish (for them) and, unkindest cut of all, basically anti-life. But looked at objectively this attitude is nothing more than the simple mirror image of the currently fashionable European obsession with the American cinema, and is if anything more rather than less rational than its European equivalent.

The American art house xenophile takes on trust, besides the Antonionis, Bergmans and Mizoguchis whose artistic value and distinctive signature are certain and easily appreciated, a number of minor films which are at least superficially intriguing and suggestive. With the native product, however, which tends in any case to look as if it had been processed in a production machine, he can afford to apply a more rigorous set of criteria, including truth to experience. Realism, God knows, is not everything in the cinema, and its standards are not always easy to apply. But when one does have a very definite idea of what is and is not real, or right, in a particular context, one reacts quickly and adversely to any portrayal of character or background which seems false, over-simplified or just commonplace. A film like *Advise and Consent*, or even *The Chapman Report*, must be felt to be literally true, to be exact, before it can seem to express any higher general truth about Power, or Sex. And if Preminger's blundering approach to domestic psychology, admittedly a side issue, and the whole sociological bias of Cukor's material gave many sensitive and intelligent Americans a pain in the neck, who are we to tell them they ought to be feeling happy?¹

As outsiders to the American scene Europeans have different, less concrete criteria for judging American movies. The roles are reversed, and with them a whole hierarchy of cinematic values. The so-called "orthodoxy" of *Cahiers du Cinéma* in the Fifties is the perfect paradigm case, for it took as its pinnacles of cinematic achievement the ultra-commercial Hitchcock and Hawks, and admitted as canonical a number of other American but hardly any French directors. Except in their worship of particular idols, mostly American, the *Cahiers* writers showed a rather narrow spectrum of tastes, but the way they used systematically to exalt these idols in order correspondingly to run down the native "production de qualité," the Cléments and Clouzots of a few years back, mirrors perfectly the attitude of the American xenophiles. The cult of *mise en scène* at the expense of subject and script can be put down, crudely, to the vulgar fact that many writers on *Cahiers*, Marcorelles in particular excepted, in the first place understood very little English, and, secondly, had no interest in the particular contemporary problems that animate the flattest of American realistic films. Thus they miss half the point of Tashlin's comedies, their lunatic dialogues, they find Huston tedious and Wyler, since they dropped him, contrived; and, going all out for the "savoureux cachet d'exotisme" and a mythical image of America, they find it in the heroic Westerns

¹This leads to the situation in which *La Vérité* can be judged an accurate portrait of the Frenchwoman, by the standards of myth, while *The Chapman Report*, a far better film, is found wanting, by the standards of reality, as a study of the American Female. But perhaps it is just a question of finding females less interesting than women.

²Jean Domarchi in *Cahiers* 130, April 1962. On the subject of Wyler it is worth relating that Bazin, in the old days, used to like him on the grounds, among others, that his intentions were perfectly realised in effect. It appears that Bazin misunderstood a statement of Wyler's that he made his films "out of my own feelings" to mean "outside, independently of". (See article by Gérard Gozlan in *Positif*, July, 1962.) Wyler's films are certainly cold, lacking in emotion: but not for the reason Bazin supposed.



Above: Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint in Hitchcock's "North by Northwest". Below: Kirk Douglas, with Oscar, in Minnelli's "Two weeks in Another Town".

of Anthony Mann, in the baroque rhetoric of Welles and in a paranoiac vision of the underworld seen through the eyes of Samuel Fuller. *Cahiers* has a little cult, doubtless perfectly genuine, of artistic individualism in all its forms: what they claim to look for is the particular individual vision (what Losey, more realistically, calls a signature) that distinguishes a *film d'auteur* from a mere production. But their ability to distinguish and to assess critically the particular vision is often vitiated by their acceptance of a myth—the European myth





Claire Bloom in "The Chapman Report": "... found wanting, by the standards of reality, as a study of the American female."

of America; or a European (outsider's) version of the Great American Myth.

The French in any case are well known to be obsessed with America, in a way that must infuriate *le grand Charles*. The obsession has two levels, material and ideal. On the surface, but only on the surface, the pin-tables and juke boxes in every café, the ubiquitous "bloudjinz" (Queneau) and all the material trappings of "coca-colonisation" (Billy Wilder; but not original). More profound, but less widespread, confined in fact to a section of the intellectuals, is a mythical image of America as the anti-France. From Miles Davis to Marlon Brando, William Faulkner to comic strips, American culture offers many Frenchmen the vision of a new world, poetic, violent and free. It offers a positive, if hopelessly idealised, counter-image to the ordered, academic, bourgeois tradition



that stretches from *La Princesse de Clèves* to René Clair. This Americomania affects even a fringe of the extreme left, which is quite prepared at times to accept alongside its Soviet super-ego the great American Id; and provides a curious degree of common ground for such apparent incompatibles as Sartre, Malraux (once upon a very long time), Butor, Breton and the Surrealists, and most of the younger generation of film-makers —Resnais (*Harry Dickson*), Reichenbach (*L'Amérique Insolite*) Melville (the name alone!), Godard and Truffaut (the B-picture) and (Cadillacs and the U.S. Navy) Jacques Demy.

Lest this list should seem to be too absurdly all-embracing it should be emphasised that the same myth may be expressed in many forms; and in any case to be interested in, even influenced by, American literature or films does not in the first place necessarily imply a myth at all. The Italian neo-realist movement is a case in point. When Visconti adapts an American novel, *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, for the screen as *Ossessione*, or when novelists like Pavese or Vittorini reject the mandarin prose and adopt a vernacular style modelled direct on Hemingway, the American influence is purely external and does not affect their central preoccupations. Even Pavese, when he deliberately mythologises America from the point of view of the emigré in his classic novel *The Moon and the Bonfires*, refuses to assimilate the myth but tries to use it as an instrument of criticism. The neo-realist cinema, obstinately demystifying, ignores the American myth altogether. It may eventually have succumbed to a new mythology of its own invention, but it never compromised with the old.

With the French, however, starting with Sartre, the myth is there from the beginning. The *situation* of the characters in his novel *Les Chemins de la Liberté*, exposed to the agonies of major political choice, is not an American situation: but it would not be too far-fetched to maintain that their *attitudes*, ostensibly those of *L'Être et le Néant*, derive most plausibly from no more recondite source than the American cinema, particularly the thriller, of before the war, for which Sartre has an extravagant and irrational enthusiasm. The myth enters, as an abstraction, by the back door. The same could be said of Camus' *La Peste*, where the famous *style blanc* goes hand in hand with a morality that can be fairly described as etiolated-Bogartian. Neither Sartre nor Camus could be accused of subscribing to the American myth of America. They tend rather to create a myth of their own, or more exactly to construct a fable using as one of their elements an idealised image of certain American attitudes. And there is a world of difference between the two.

The distinction here between the American myth of America (as exemplified by a film like *Giant*, and eagerly absorbed at face value by gullible Europeans), and a myth created on this side of the Atlantic out of elements easily assimilated into an idealised image, is important. Not only does it free serious writers like Sartre from the charge of mythomania, but it also explains why, in the hands of certain movie enthusiasts who really are mythomaniac in this sense, the myth becomes completely self-perpetuating, and meaningless in any terms other than its own. In this and like cases there is one myth built into the subject and another, theoretically distinct, which exists only in the spectator's consciousness: objective and subjective, the fable and the image. Generally, however, the two elements do not remain distinct but act in concert with each other. If the film provides, ready made, the very myth the spectator is seeking for, the fable/image syndrome works in perpetual accelerating and crescendo; and as in the case of Bogart and James Dean, the myth, like the Monster of Frankenstein, gets quite out of control of its creator. Long before they died both Dean and Bogart had become unreal beings, victims of a cinematic equivalent of economic inflation

Buñuel's "Las Hurdes": "It is not a metaphor but a statement, and it is not beautiful."

in which demand was always, but only by a short head, outrunning supply.

Against this there is the case of Vincente Minnelli's *Two Weeks in Another Town*—Minnelli on Minnelli (Movie called it a "testament"), or rather Hollywood on Hollywood, lightly disguised as Cinecittà. Here the process instead of being self-perpetuating threatens to be self-destructive. We cannot afford to take the film at face value, because to do so would be to accept an image of Hollywood which conflicts with our ideal image of the American cinema—and Vincente Minnelli. That is, if we are real gone Minnelli fans we cannot. Someone who just regards Minnelli as a first-rate director of not always first-rate movies does not experience this difficulty: to him *Two Weeks in Another Town* is a film which trades on the ambiguities of the situation (film within film, illusion within illusion) while making a slightly less than whole-hearted attempt to unmask them. The unsophisticated moviemane is perplexed, while the sophisticated, by a rapid double-take, converts the whole thing into a complicated dialectic of reality and illusion. Unfortunately—and this is the essential difference between Minnelli's film and Antonioni's *La Signora senza Camelie*—there is no reality: it is just a case of one illusion being played off, unacknowledged, against another.

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At this point we are faced with an absolute difference of principle between the moviemane and the person who, for want of a better word, I would call the humanist. To the humanist the cinema is a mirror of reality, and though all its images are by nature illusory they can and must always be correlated with the reality they reflect. The cinematic illusion is only interesting in so far as it offers a reasonable model of reality, in so far as it relates. The classic, pure Western, and the classic, impure musical offer illusions which relate badly or not at all, and which therefore are apparently not interesting. To the moviemane, however, illusion is the very essence of the cinema, and the game played by the cinema is an end and not a means. A "movie" is not just a strip of celluloid: it is a unit of entertainment. And the entertainment, in extreme cases, is perfectly self-contained: it need have only the most perfunctory relation to things outside.

A film like *Rio Bravo* is great first because it is an organic artistic whole; it is self-sustaining, consistent with itself, harmonious, and imposes its own beautifully balanced rhythm on the audience; secondly (and this is a more dangerous assumption) because it starts from movie convention, not from outside reality, and can be judged purely in terms of Hawks' other films, or other Westerns, without reference to the world outside; thirdly, because in so far as it does contain a human message (which to some moviemanes is a fact of no interest whatever) this message is of the most generalised and transcendent kind. This attitude to the cinema does not only open the doors wide to welcome the myth as an essential element of a film: it makes a myth out of the whole of the cinema itself. Not only is *Rio Bravo* a fable, drawn from a folklore tradition, and therefore set within a legendary or mythical context and significant only within that context, but its form is further conditioned, artificially, by what the audience expects and desires from the film and from the cinema in general—an ideal, self-contained, mythical experience. Like a good father telling his children stories at bedtime Hawks conscientiously fulfils the role expected of him and satisfies their demands; and if occasionally he tells the same story twice, or deliberately deceives particular expectations, or if one of the children is occasionally moved to ask "And wasn't it really you, Daddy, the man in the aeroplane, the Adventurer?" this is all part of the game. But one day some of the children will start reading Vico or Hegel or Jung, and the game will be up.

"Rio Bravo": "... an ideal, self-contained, mythical experience."

The deep gulf of communication which exists between humanists and moviemanes is neither surprising nor particularly worrying. It is tacitly assumed that while there may be people capable of liking both *Funny Face* and *La Terra Trema*, it is absurd to try to compare the two films. People who like only the one are resigned to the fact that they have no contact with people who like the other, and those of us who like both are not inclined to indulge in agonised self-examination to reconcile the two halves of our split personality. But I know that in order to enjoy *Funny Face* I have to practise a deliberate and radical suspension of disbelief, to close my mind completely, to forget the real Paris I know and attune myself to the mythical Paris of the film, to relax completely and see the film as far as possible abstractly, in terms of colour and movement. Hitchcock in his role as entertainer demands the same suspension, but he imposes it by force, which makes things much easier. With *La Terra Trema* on the other hand the only beliefs that one has to jettison are the myths. For the rest one is called upon all the time to consider issues, to grapple with problems that exist outside. The film may resolve the problems for its own purposes, to provoke a catharsis, but the issues, in life, remain alive. The two forms of experience are in theory incompatible; but in practice they may be thought of as complementary—so long as we are dealing with extreme cases, and can afford to identify the entertainment movie with myth, unreality, and the self-contained fantasy experience, and treat as serious only the realistic or the problem film.

What makes this model unworkable is that films which are at neither extreme, but which both sides are agreed on liking—films like *To Have and Have Not*, *Tirez sur le Pianiste*, *La Règle du Jeu*, *Ugetsu*, *The Eclipse*—are not just strung out in a straight line down the middle between the two extremes. They tend rather to partake in different degrees of the different elements of the syndrome. *Ugetsu* uses an explicit fable with an ulterior purpose. *Tirez* hovers between realism and fantasy and between explicit myth to be played around with and an implicit myth which is the poetic centre of the film. *La Règle du Jeu* is perfectly realistic, but has the form, and the charm, of an entertainment. *To Have and Have Not* is entertainment, and it pushes the Bogart myth as far as it can go; but there is nothing whimsical about it, in the sense in



which even the "realist" Renoir can be whimsical. *The Eclipse*, finally, is artistically self-sustaining, but it looks outward all the time to the problems of a wider world; it is far from being self-contained.

The number of possible combinations and degrees of combination is infinite, and the criteria given by the model are largely irrelevant to why these films are good or bad. It might seem reasonable, therefore, to scrap the model altogether. The trouble is that no one, ultimately, is willing to do this. The critical debate of two years ago, as between, say, *Definition* and *Oxford Opinion*, consisted mainly of each side taking up positions which implicitly accepted the polarity, and shooting away at the other side (or more often at SIGHT AND SOUND, which didn't seem to have a position at all) in order to force them to give up their position, or exterminate them, if necessary. More recently the battle has resolved itself into a squabble over disputed territory, always on the basis of the fundamental polarity. Each side in the once again cold war tends to try to appropriate to itself on its own terms the films in the middle of the field, which are so to speak neutral ground. In so far as a Western, or even a musical, can be shown to be realistic, to illuminate certain real-life situations, in so far as it can be assimilated to the ideal model, the humanist lays claim to it as his. Conversely the moviemane, the sophisticated moviemane who has read *Cahiers*, extends his field surreptitiously to cover any film which, like *Viridiana*, can in some degree be assimilated to his model, the inward-looking ideal of a good and satisfying movie³. This habit of poaching, of looking at common ground in opposite terms, is liable to cause much more resentment than a straightforward admission of incompatibility. It is also, or ought to be, avoidable.

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I have said that the extreme positions are held only implicitly. It would be better to say that the people who do hold them categorically are not on the whole the people who write in magazines. The extreme humanist position could only be held by someone who rarely went to the cinema, and had no feeling for it anyway. The naïve moviemaniac position is held, unobtrusively, by a lot of people who just happen to be very fond of certain types of film. It is not quite the position, or at any rate not the explicit position, of the writers on *Movie*, nor of *Cahiers*. These writers are what I would call sophisticated moviemanes. They have not abandoned the naïve position, but they aim in various ways to extend, and in some cases transcend it, in the tradition of the late André Bazin. Bazin at his best was a great and perceptive critic, and incidentally a great slaughterer of myths. At his worst he wrote like an octopus; he stretched forth all-embracing tentacles in all directions, and as he stretched squirted out incomprehensible blobs of ink which resolved themselves into phrases like "the existence of the cinema precedes its essence" and "*toute la réalité est sur le même plan*".⁴ The liberal application of such phrases enabled Bazin and his followers to absorb the narrow enclosed world of the naïve moviemane and bring the cinema into contact with the Absolute, if nothing else. Unfortunately, although the octopus could swallow the oyster, he never managed to crack it open first. The movie in Bazin's system remains perfectly self-contained.

³*Viridiana* proved to be "not only a great film, but indeed a really good movie" writes Andrew Sarris in the eponymous magazine *Movie* (No. 1, June 1962).

⁴"All of reality is on a single plane." Thanks to an ambiguity in the French word *plan*, which means both plane and "shot", "take", this metaphysical monstrosity can be used to prove, *a priori*, the inherent wrongness of montage techniques. So much for *Potemkin*, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and *Hiroshima mon Amour*.

The metaphysical jargon obscures and does not illuminate the relation of the cinema to the real world, and the new state of moviemania is ultimately not much different from the old—only a little more confusing and confused.

Though not entirely immune, *Movie* is far less afflicted than its putative father by this metaphysical madness. Its debt to *Cahiers* is mainly to the opposing trend on the magazine, to the *politique des auteurs*. For the rest it remains very close to the naïve position. If the writers on *Movie* devote a lot of space in their reviews to describing the content of a film, it is because content, events, is as much a part of what-is-actually-happening-on-the-screen as are camera-movements and compositions. And if they are concerned at all to elucidate what Preminger has to say about Israel, or what Rossellini has to say about freedom in *Vanina Vanini*, it is because Preminger (or, as the case may be, Rossellini) is saying it, and Preminger and Rossellini are members of the True Church, like Donen, Minnelli, Hawks⁵. There is, be it noted, only One True Church, even if it has many prophets, and there is one cult—the almost mystic and certainly hermetic movie-experience. What is still lacking is any attempt to open the oyster. It is not now swallowed up into the vortex of metaphysics, but left to lie, a sacred object of pious veneration, and naïvely supposed to enshrine the intention of its creator.

Neither *Cahiers'* attempt to transcend nor *Movie's* to extend the naïve moviemaniac position do anything to make that position more acceptable. Indeed the naïve moviemane, reserving his enthusiasm for the "pure" movie, is on far safer ground than the sophisticated with his incautious liking for Antonioni, Resnais or Buñuel. When Antonioni casts him adrift on a sea of hopeless non-communication, or when Buñuel throws bourgeois hypocrisy in his face like a wet sponge soused in vinegar, or when Resnais, in *Guernica*, *Nuit et Brouillard* or *Hiroshima*, stabs at his consciousness with a cruel reminder of suffering, the sophisticated moviemane cannot take refuge in a pathetic cry of "But it's Art!"—not life but only art, or not only life but Art. Bazin said that Buñuel's *Las Hurdes* was an allegory of human misery, and that human misery, in the allegory, was transformed into Beauty. He was wrong. *Las Hurdes* is not a metaphor but a statement, and it is not beautiful. *Las Hurdes*, *Viridiana*, *Nuit et Brouillard*, *L'Avventura* even, are extreme cases. Few films are as poignant, or as pointed, as these in their evocation of suffering. Nor is suffering by any means the only subject of great art. But the argument remains unaltered. Most films in greater or less degree transcend the frontiers of the self-contained cinematic experience. And all films relate in some way to wider fields of inner or outer experience than is provided by the cinema alone. The cinema is parasitic on reality even when it transcends it, and even the myths would not be what they are without a world in which to belong. To deal with the cinema at all is to deal with a complicated set of objective and subjective relations: fundamentally those between the mind and the outside world, but also between fantasy and experience on the psychological level, and image and reality in and outside the film. This ought, however formulated, to be a platitude (or series of platitudes), and not to need repeating. But if some of the attitudes I have been considering are any guide, it is not a platitude, and there can be nothing lost in saying it again.

⁵The religious vocabulary is particularly apposite to describing a form of criticism which can glibly talk of *Rio Bravo* (!) as a religious film. As for form versus content, this has never been the real issue at stake between the moviemanes and the rest. Speaking for myself, I find (in particular) Preminger's ideas on politics totally uninteresting, but his *mise en scène*, given a more propitious subject, enthralling.



A scene from "The Birds".

IN THE PICTURE

Echoes from The Birds

ALBERT JOHNSON writes: The landscape was what might be called sunny-Brontean, with expanses of grassy meadows and suddenly looming groves until one reached the tiny settlement of Bodega Bay, in Northern California. Here Alfred Hitchcock was finishing location shooting for his new film, *The Birds*, from a screenplay by Evan Hunter based on a Daphne du Maurier story. As usual, nothing much had been publicised about the script, except that the birds of the earth suddenly turn on mankind, the first indication of their onslaught occurring in this remote place. Down by the shore, Hitchcock was directing his new discovery "Tippi" Hedren and giving instructions to his cameraman, Robert Burks. "I'd like not necessarily to see her," said Hitchcock, pointing to a small launch by the dockside. "Give her a brief take and let me see how much of her coat is showing . . ." Miss Hedren, a former television actress, ash-blonde and in the Grace Kelly tradition, cut an elegant fur-coated figure in the brisk winds of the bay. She stood holding a bird-cage and talking to the character actor "Doodles" Weaver. "You have a boat for me, Stanley." "Yes mam, the one right below . . ." Hitchcock interrupted: "Why don't you give her the bird-cage there, then lead her below?"

After this short scene the crew broke for lunch, and I rode with Hitchcock across the bay to the old farmhouse which had been rented for the film. How, I asked, had he chosen this particular location? "I was making *Shadow of a Doubt* when the local Chamber of Commerce brought me on a rather undignified outing up here, and I remembered it as being thoroughly beautiful in a haunting kind of way, just the place for this story. We've rented the farmhouse and fixed it up a bit

for the film, but the interiors are all being done in Hollywood. The farm was once owned by the Russian settlers who lived in this area during most of the last century, and it was pretty deserted when we came—all rotting wood. What a charming name for a home! I believe one should find the location before doing the script. On *Shadow of a Doubt* Thornton Wilder and I came up and "cased the joint" and I've done the same with Evan Hunter for *The Birds*."

We stood on a high ridge looking down at the farmhouse garden, arranged for a children's party sequence which was to be shot during the afternoon. Hitchcock outlined the plot of *The Birds* to me and its love angle, involving a sophisticated model (Miss Hedren) who meets a personable young man (Rod Taylor) in a San Francisco pet shop. Their mutual attraction leads her to follow him to his home in Bodega Bay, where his mother (Jessica Tandy) is giving a birthday party for his younger brother. During this short weekend, the birds begin their assaults upon the townspeople.

"The film is in colour," Hitchcock said, "but most of the shooting is in subdued light because I don't want it to be bright and beautiful. The opening shot of the film is Miss Hedren walking down a San Francisco street and looking at the sky . . . The use of the camera should be unobtrusive, and the audience must subconsciously become involved with people and locale. I'm basically interested in audiences and in what the camera can do. In order to avoid a cliché in using the camera, I've even tried to prove that you can be cinematic in a telephone box—the heroine's trapped there and it becomes a glass cage, surrounded by predatory birds. Of course cross-cutting for suspense goes right back to Griffith. But I have a scene in *The Birds* where Hedren goes to the school to pick up Taylor's younger brother, and waits for him outside in the playground. I cut behind her to a shot of four crows perched on the jungle-gym. She calmly smokes a cigarette: the audience must know more than she does. Then ten birds are shown, in a 30-foot shot of this girl quietly smoking—the dullest shot ever. She looks up at a crow flying. When she looks down—three hundred crows! Once the audience is caught, the camera goes to the crows and stays on them. Where are the children, everybody will be asking.

"When I first came over to the United States, Selznick used to complain about my goddamn jigsaw method of cutting. I rarely look at rushes, but there is a projection room over in the motel where we're staying, and I must say most of *The Birds*

has gone along very well. I have a team who were with me on earlier pictures, and by now we have a sort of telepathic communication that sets us right. I'm hoping that *The Birds* will excite audiences. It has its moments, such as the experience of hearing thousands of birds outside a boarded-up house in which one is hiding. One hears the birds but doesn't see them. They come in waves. There's another scene in which some gulls attack a gas station attendant. The gulls are able to smash their way into doorways, but the lovebirds don't join in this war against humanity."

Hitchcock seemed extremely pleased with *The Birds*, even if shots of the attacking creatures sometimes took a bit of finagling. He didn't want "terribly well-known screen faces" in the film, although in a melodrama (*The Birds* he regards rather as a thriller) it was often better to have a star. Both Donat in *The Thirty Nine Steps* and Grant in *North by Northwest* made the situation more interesting. "One of the biggest problems is casting bits," Hitchcock said. "They shouldn't be too familiar. I remember sitting through a recent showing of *Trader Horn*, and after all those perils in the wilds of Africa the travellers arrived at the trading post. Up from behind the counter pops C. Aubrey Smith. I've never heard such belly laughter!"

"I'm very happy with the cast for *The Birds*, though I've had a bit of casting annoyance with one of the children in the town. He's the most obnoxious child I've ever encountered, and in my first screening of applicants I deliberately eliminated him. Somehow, though, he managed to get into the film. He comes up to me every day, slaps me on the back and says 'Hello, Alfred!' He's frightening, like a little man, and I suspect that the woman who's pretending to be his mother is actually his wife. The other day he asked me 'Where shall I run, Alfred?' and I pointed to the water and said, 'Run straight out into the ocean until the water gets over your head, then sit down until I call you.' He let my suggestion go right past him. I suppose he's used to this sort of comment from grown-ups."

International Film Season

DEREK HILL writes: The audience figures for BBC Television's recent International Film Season invite all manner of fascinating comparisons. They ranged, it seems, from 6½ million for *Ashes and Diamonds* to 8½ million for *Bicycle Thieves*; and Gordon Smith, who with Dora Nirva was principally responsible for the presentations, worked out that the films shown would have needed a run of at least fifty years in the average specialist cinema to clock up such an audience. More than three times as many people in Britain have now seen *Bicycle Thieves* as *South Pacific*.

The season consisted of the Wajda trilogy, *Hiroshima mon Amour*, *Lady with the Little Dog*, *Bicycle Thieves*, and the British premiere of Olmi's *Time Stood Still*, actually bought by Smith for the BBC at Venice two years ago, before the director had embarked on *Il Posto*. (The Corporation finds it is able to offer a price quite competitive with the usual return from British distribution, leaving out of account, of course, the bigger commercial films.) The admirable subtitling of *Bicycle Thieves* was organised by the BBC and carried out by a Dutch company with larger than usual lettering ideal for television purposes. Only the Resnais film was dubbed, and it was noticeable that this seemed considerably less disturbing on television than it normally is in the cinema.

Inevitably there has been a sharp reaction from the film industry. Gala, who distribute *Hiroshima mon Amour* here, were forced to withdraw it from their own cinemas during the week of its television presentation; and they complain that attendances since its screening have shrunk to next to nothing. The film was sold direct to the BBC by the producer. Kenneth Rive, managing director of Gala, has since issued a statement to the effect that his company, by far the biggest of continental film importers, will in future refuse to handle any film from a producer who has sold a film to television which is already being distributed here and which is less than ten years old. He has also written to Contemporary, who sold the Wajda trilogy and *Lady with the Little Dog* to the BBC, to advise them that in

view of these deals no Contemporary films will be shown in any of Gala's cinemas.

The Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association also asked for an explanation of the circumstances surrounding the Contemporary sales to television. Although at the time of writing the General Council has yet to meet to consider the committee report on the situation, the CEA has already emphasised that its resolution of last November ("it must take all possible steps to dissuade and deter those in a position to do so from making available to television those cinema films which, if televised, it believes would directly or indirectly cause damage to the cinema box-office") is intended to apply to all films irrespective of their country of origin.

If the exhibitors were to take action preventing distributors of continental films from making future sales to television, and if suggestions of possible repercussions to overseas producers were extended along the lines of Gala's warning, the BBC would be placed in a difficult position. The first International Film Season might thus become the last. This would be doubly sad, as the appreciation figures for the presentations have been very high. *Kanal* obtained an appreciation rating (expressed on an average enjoyment scale unrelated to the actual audience figure) almost as high as any British or American film ever shown by the BBC—despite the fact that the order of two of its reels was reversed. And *Bicycle Thieves* was still more popular.

Report from Lodz

ROBERT GESSNER, as Ford Foundation Visiting Professor, recently spent some time at the famous Polish film school at Lodz. He writes:—Of the 157 students enrolled in the Polish theatre and film school 18 are foreigners, five of them being British. I asked each separately why he chose to travel so great a distance at such expense, learn a most difficult language, and live for four years in a drab and depressing factory city, Lodz, the Manchester of Poland, whereas he could have hopped the channel for Paris to study at the IDHEC in a language with which he was familiar. All five gave, in essence, identical answers: the training is worth all the hardship and handicaps. So, too, answered students from Bulgaria, Iceland, India, Iraq, Turkey, Japan and the USSR (the last two countries have their own film schools!).

What makes the training at the Panstwowa Wyzsza Szkola Teatralna i Filmowa so special? Student and feature films attest to an exceptional creativity, remarkable for a country which had no film production of note prior to World War Two. To answer the question at first hand, I accepted the invitation of Professor Jerzy Toeplitz, Rector of the Lodz school, who had recently spent seven months examining cinema curricula in American universities.

For three weeks I lived with faculty and students, observed classes, film production, facilities; attended lectures and lectured myself; viewed films of various vintages (including the Stalinist) and levels of competence. I can conclude, without reservation, that the standards of admission, of continuance, and for graduation are higher than any film study programme elsewhere. Modestly the Poles defer to the VGIK in Moscow with its 350 salaried technicians (one per student), but know as well as others that Russian student films, while technically polished, are artistically far behind the



A scene from "Les Carabiniers", the new film recently completed by Jean-Luc Godard.

Poles. Scriptwriting courses and acting before camera courses are two areas in which the Poles, self-admittedly, lag.

Students apply for admission in one of five faculties: Acting, Camera, Directing, Theory and Criticism, and Production Organisation (a two-year course for training budget controllers and unit managers). Last year 300 applied for Camera, and through faculty interviewing were reduced to 60. A five-day examination brought the 60 down to 30; by the end of the first year 10 of these failed to pass. Finally, to complete the picture: in the 1962 graduating class there were two cameramen. Also, one director, two producers, 13 actors, and as yet no doctorates in the newest branch, Theory and Criticism. Not all students wish to become diploma graduates, and drop out for studio jobs.

If a foreign student can pay, he is charged about £117 a month, which covers tuition, film and labs, rent and meals; fewer than ten pay, all other foreign students being on full scholarships. No Polish student pays; he receives 800 zloty a month pocket money (about £4). The total school budget is \$300,000 annually—"the cost of two of our features." An English student figured that her second-year film would cost upwards of £5,000 to produce in London; the diploma film of a graduate would cost upwards of \$40,000 on a commercial U.S. budget. All shooting is on 35mm. The Polish students thought I was joking when I said no American university, in the heartland of capitalism, could afford such quality and quantity production.

The amount of celluloid exposed is another reason for the school's success. According to curriculum requirements, a camera student will shoot in black-and-white, colour, silent, sound, tricks, animation, special techniques, and a diploma film (shooting done at a ratio of four foot shot to one foot used)—approximately 90,000 feet in his four years, equal to a dozen average-length features. In the course of his training, one Polish camera student shoots more film than all the camera classes in the U.S., or the IDHEC in Paris and Centro Sperimentale in Rome, shoot in a year.

Production quality is achieved in part through a unique student freedom from strict faculty supervision. Most of the faculty live in Warsaw and commute to Lodz for two or three days a week. Thus professorial absenteeism, officially lamented, is a student blessing in disguise. Professors are effective in their penetrating exams of applicants and students. A potential cameraman or director, for instance, is tested for plastic sensitivity and visual intelligence by being asked to (1) compose still life within a frame; (2) compose and light a portrait; (3) compose a live nude model from the painting school; (4) view a short fragment of film once, then write a script for what was seen; (5) edit into a sequence a series of 25 still pictures based on a given title; (6) after 30 minutes of preparation compose with still life or persons an action based on a given phrase or slogan with a climax or blackout; (7) dramatise and direct actors based on a short story of student's choice; (8) draw with charcoal or pencil a still life or portrait; (9) compose colours in an abstract perspective; (10) draw geometrically three-dimensional patterns in various perspectives; (11) write a critique of any film recently seen, discussing scenario, direction, camera, editing and acting in technical detail; and (12) submit to a conference of professors inquiring into a variety of subjects.

Finally, a salaried staff of technical assistants guides students through sound recording, lab printing, set painting, and film cutting. Though students make the decisions in editing, lighting and sound, they depend on others for completed executions—not a totally happy system.

The Polish film school presents a challenge that can't be ignored. Are only Socialist countries rich enough to afford a place in the cinema sun of tomorrow?

Cartoons and Commercials

DEREK HILL writes: Advertising men, whether they like it or not, are becoming patrons of the arts. Richard Williams, for instance, is embarking on the most whole-hearted exploitation of the opportunities inadvertently offered by the wealthy field of TV commercial production. The fact that his prize-winning one-minute commercial *Guinness at the Albert Hall* cost twice as much as his ten-minute *Love Me, Love Me, Love Me* has confirmed his conviction that a cartoon company can make enough from commercials to back as many independent productions as it wishes to make.

Richard Williams Animated Films aims to produce between twenty and thirty commercials a year, enough to support a programme of personal projects by Williams and the four talented animators who have recently joined him—Ron Wyatt, regarded as the best ideas man to emerge in commercials, Tony Cattaneo, a



Jacques Rivette holds the British Film Institute's Sutherland Trophy, awarded for his "*Paris Nous Appartient*" and presented by the British Ambassador in Paris on February 22nd. Photograph by Keystone.

designer who has abandoned the Royal Academy in favour of cartoons, Tony Gearty, a freelance animator who enjoys one of the highest reputations in the business, and Charles Jenkins, a 21-year-old technical virtuoso. Other animation groups—notably Biographic and TV Cartoons—have diverted some of their profits towards independent production. But Williams stresses that his company's unsponsored work will not get any outside backing from such sources as the National Film Finance Corporation. "If we don't borrow, we won't have to worry about losing other people's money," he explains; for the fact remains that despite the agitation over the past year or two for adequate distribution and/or a cash prize system for unsponsored shorts, it is still virtually impossible for the film-maker in this field to retrieve his costs or get much of a showing outside a few specialised cinemas.

Williams' current project, *Circus Drawings*, will be completed any day now. His next cartoon will be *I. Vor Pittfaulks, the Universal Confidence Man*, a half-hour CinemaScope production which promises to take *The Little Island's* unique experiments in using a kind of visual language for philosophic statement even further. In this black comedy of the rise of a fascist the characters will talk in images which dominate the screen while they themselves remain dehumanised pigmies. Tristram Cary, who collaborated on *The Little Island*, will again be working with Williams and Tony Cattaneo will be the principal animator. *Pittfaulks* will probably be in production for six months to a year.

During the summer Williams will be directing a live action feature in Toronto, *Flee Seven Ways*. Curiously this, too, is the story of a confidence man. It will star Kenneth Williams and, with luck, Arthur Kennedy, and is being produced by Eyeline Films, a British company which shares a similar attitude to the usefulness of commercials and which enables Richard Williams to keep his overheads to a minimum by renting him a floor of their building at cost and allowing him to share many secretarial and technical facilities.

All the Williams team will be involved on *Pussy, Pussy, the Story of a Pussy Cat Called Armstrong*, another cartoon based on an idea by Stan Hayward, author of *Love Me, Love Me, Love Me*. Hayward himself is still with the National Film Board of Canada, but has left Humour and entered Science. Personal projects include Ron Wyatt's notion for a children's series called *The Clubhouse Show* and Charles Jenkins' development of a new back-lit multi-exposure animation technique (briefly used in *Love Me* in a two-minute film about a butterfly. "A more controlled development of McLaren," explained Williams, "using water and light."

**PENELOPE
HOUSTON**

**JOHN
GILLETT**

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF

B



BLOCKBUSTER: a film running not less than about a hundred and fifty minutes, shot in colour, or in some big screen process, or both, shown initially on a "hard ticket" or "roadshow" basis. Block to be busted: audience resistance. The word itself edged its way into Hollywood usage seven or eight years ago, giving a comfortingly aggressive lift to the vocabulary of an industry all too evidently on the defensive. The practice of blockbusting—that is, of making some form of superspectacular—is at least as old as *Intolerance*. But the systematic construction of blockbusters in bulk, as it were, is something new. And at this moment, with *Cleopatra* at last within sight of land after one of the roughest passages in screen history, and with George Stevens' *The Greatest Story Ever Told* settling down on location in the Utah Desert after more than three years preparation, it seems worth looking at the blockbusters a little more closely. What is the job they are designed for, and are they doing it? Are they designed at all, or do they just happen?

I. OFF THE SCREEN

TO A CONSIDERABLE EXTENT, a blockbuster is a film for people who don't go to the pictures. It recognises, as Hollywood in general has at last come to do, that the habit audience is a thing of the past, that audiences have to be prised out of their homes as limpets are detached from their rocks. It's a truism that the average (which means medium-cost, medium-range, medium-publicity) movie has become an uninsured risk. The blockbuster represents a much more sizeable gamble; but at least it brings some measure of built-in insurance with it. People who haven't been to the cinema for a year will turn out to see *Lawrence of Arabia* or *The Longest Day* or *How the West Was Won*. To this extent the blockbuster is helping to keep open the lines of communication between the cinema and its missing audience—although, arguably, it may be keeping them open only for the benefit of future blockbusters.

If there is a coherent theory of blockbusting, this attitude to the audience has been one of its assumptions from the outset. Selling the film becomes at least as important as making it, and it's in the selling area that some of the more crucial decisions will be taken. Just after Joshua Logan had completed shooting on *Fanny*, for instance, he told a London press conference that he didn't at that stage know whether the picture would run for two or three hours: the length would depend on whether it was to be shown on a "hard ticket" basis (booked seats; non-continuous performances) or not. He didn't seem to regard this, though his press audience clearly did, as in any sense a wasteful or extravagant line of approach. The bigger the film, the more selling it demands; and a sales campaign like the one for *Lawrence of Arabia* shows just how systematically, how thoroughly and with what persuasive guile the publicity machinery can be geared to operate. No one is to be left under any illusion that he is simply "going to the pictures". The film can be seen at only one theatre; tickets can be booked; such a long time will be

spent in the cinema that arrangements for meals and transport will have to be adjusted. Later on, when the blockbuster finally goes the rounds, it can still share in all the accumulated backwash of publicity. The recent release of *South Pacific*, after a five year run at the Dominion, looked much more like a provincial tour of, say, *My Fair Lady* than any ordinary film general release.

Since the blockbuster depends to some extent on its scarcity value, on all this elaborate confecting of a sense of occasion, the commercial development of the policy could in the long run defeat its own ends. At the end of last year there were as many as eight hard ticket films running simultaneously in London, surrounded by a satellite cluster of moderately long and moderately costly pictures (*Hatari!*, *Gypsy*, *Billy Rose's Jumbo*) which the trade had decided to sell in the more conventional way. If the time were to come (as no doubt it could) when all the first-run cinemas in the West End were screening spectaculars, might they end up by cutting each others' commercial throats? If the spectacular becomes the commonplace, where do you then look for your special occasion? Just how many long-runners the market can stand remains to be discovered, although with Stanley Kramer's *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, George Stevens' *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, Nicholas Ray's *55 Days at Peking*, Anthony Mann's *Fall of the Roman Empire*, George Cukor's *My Fair Lady*, Fred Zinnemann's *Hawaii*, Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard*, Dino De Laurentiis' *The Bible*, and even the Russian *War and Peace* on the way, it looks as though we are going to find out tolerably soon.

Variety's annual list of the all-time box-office champions seems, at first glance, to offer all the explanation that's needed for the new policy. The winner: still the unchallengeable *Gone With the Wind*. (And every blockbuster, one might add parenthetically, would be *Gone With the Wind* if it could.) The runners-up: *Ben-Hur*, *The Ten Commandments*, *Around the World in 80 Days*, *West Side Story*, *The Robe*, *South Pacific*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Spartacus*. The success formula could hardly be more directly laid down than by this list, with its clear suggestion that the way to make millions is to spend millions, to film in the biggest screen process the traffic will bear, and to sign up Charlton Heston if he happens to be available.

These *Variety* figures relate only to the markets of the United States and Canada, although one assumes that the pattern they indicate also holds good for the rest of the world. Look at them a bit more closely, however, and the nature of the risk Hollywood is running becomes more apparent. In rough and general terms, it can be said that the American industry currently expects to collect about half its revenue in the North American market and the rest overseas. It is also commonly assumed that before a movie can expect to show any kind of profit, it must earn at least double its basic production cost. If one were to take £4 million as a representative production bill for a blockbuster, one should therefore be not too far out in assuming that this also represents the amount the film ought to earn in North America. If *Variety* is correct, however, only 15 films in the cinema's history have taken as much as 12 million dollars out of that market. This is the kind of rough and ready arithmetic forced on one in the absence of reliable world statistics. But it demonstrates a simple point: producers making this kind of investment are not merely banking on a best-seller, but on steering their film

LOCKBUSTING

into a place among the cinema's all-time best-sellers. *Cleopatra*, we've been told, must earn upwards of £22 million before it breaks even; and with Elizabeth Taylor, Darryl Zanuck, a production history which has run like a serial story through the columns of the world's press, and ticket prices raised to an estimated \$5, it seems a cast-iron certainty that it's going to do it. But what of some of the others?

Another elementary and basic fact which is extraordinarily (not to say ridiculously) difficult to unearth concerns the number of cinemas in the world equipped to show films in the biggest of the big screen processes (Cinerama, Super Technirama 70, Ultra Panavision 70, etc.). Here one runs straight into a statistical quagmire. The *Motion Picture Herald*, last December, said that "most estimates place the number of domestic (i.e. United States) theatres equipped for wide film projection at about 120. There are more than twice this number (about 250) in foreign countries. Consider with this total the estimated 120 world theatres equipped to project Cinerama." A little later, however, Britain's *Kine Weekly* put the world total of Cinerama installations at only 73 (50 in the United States and 23 overseas), with a further twenty-odd cinemas scheduled to open during the next few months. Cinerama is clearly expanding fast, with George Stevens' and Stanley Kramer's last-minute decisions to switch their new films to the process as evidence of a box-office trend. The 70mm. films such as *Lawrence of Arabia* and *El Cid*, *Barabbas* and *West Side Story*, depend almost as much on the size of the screen. Yet no one in this country (which includes the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association, the Kinematograph Renters' Society and the Board of Trade) seems to know just how many cinemas in Britain are able to show them. The Rank Organisation say that they now have 29 cinemas equipped for 70mm., and Associated British Cinemas claim 18. Other circuits, presumably, may add a few more to the total. Again, a sales decision seems to be called for. If the blockbusters are to retain their exclusivity, then people will

have to travel to key towns to see them in their original format. If not, then we are in for another period of re-equipment, as happened a decade ago with CinemaScope, with the major circuits throughout the world as usual holding all the trumps.

If the blockbuster banks on its difference from other films, however, it must at the same time assume universality. It must break through *all* the audience barriers, so that it can be sure of an all-class, all-income, all-nationality public. To this end, it must be carefully and deliberately disinfected, as a matter of production policy, of any attitudes which might annoy anyone, anywhere. War films must be neutralised (like *The Longest Day*); religious films must keep in mind religious minorities (like *King of Kings*), though they can afford the luxury of rebuking Imperial Rome; producers, remembering that half their prospective audience is outside America, must be wary of any theme which bears so directly on the American scene that it lacks appeal for foreigners. Westerns, of course, are exempt: Hollywood long ago converted the Western into international currency.

The word *must*, in this context, really is a categorical imperative: once the investment has been made, and the initial risk taken, the film is committed to certain box-office demands. To satisfy them, insurance policies have to be taken out in every other direction. Directors who enter this kind of territory are liable to complain of front-office interference, of alterations to the original conception, of producers moving in to dictate the final shape of the film. To the outsider, however, it seems only surprising that they should be surprised. The blockbuster is a producer's picture by necessity, a director's picture by chance or good fortune. Freedom to annoy, to perplex, to startle an audience, to give them something just beyond their grasp rather than comfortably within it, appears part of the price to be paid when the budget goes over a certain level. Can one imagine, for instance, that John Frankenheimer would ever have got away with the superlatively cheeky brainwashing sequence in *The Manchurian Candidate* (or with the rest of the film, for that matter), if his movie had been devised on a blockbuster scale? Directors might argue, with some reason, that they have just as sound a grasp of commercial picture-making as the front office. But it's the front office, ultimately, which will have to face the shareholders.

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All the same, film-making is a human endeavour, the work of men struggling to create something durable, something of their own, out of the great intransigent lumps of raw material at their disposal: the script half-a-dozen writers have tinkered with and left unfinished, the star with more box-office reputation than ability, the locations which must be fitted in somewhere, the cast of thousands. They begin also with an obligation: the film has to earn more money, from more people, than any kind of planned film-making has ever before assumed *regularly* was possible.

In these circumstances, film-makers need tenacity beyond the call of duty. George Stevens, for instance, began planning *The Greatest Story Ever Told* back in the Fifties. It was to be released by Fox, and in April 1960 it was reported that it would cost \$10 million, would go into production later that year and would be released in 1961. By September, 1961, two million dollars had been spent on preparatory work, 20th Century-Fox had dropped the project, and Stevens had announced that he would go ahead with different financial backing, aiming at a release early in 1963. May, 1962, brought the news that the sets alone would cost \$1,400,000 (roughly the cost of a non-blockbusting Hollywood feature) and that the film would begin shooting in July. "The budget is elastic, and what has to be spent will be," said the executive producer.

*The grandeur that was Cinecittà . . .
Director's desk on the "Cleopatra" set.*



And now, at long, long last, Stevens has begun work on a project which, before it is finished, will have used up at least five years of his creative life.

The case may be exceptional, but it is not unique. David Lean put years of work into *Lawrence*; Fred Zinnemann was planning *Hawaii* more than two years ago, and has recently postponed its starting date until April 1964, planning to fit a more modest production into the intervening year. Long shooting schedules, preceded by even longer periods of preparation, mean that film-makers are being asked to hold on to whatever creative drives they may have for formidable periods of time; to sustain what is really an immense industrial undertaking, but one which will depend for its final impact on the way the human factor stands up to the strains imposed on it. Artistic creation, and for that matter commercial creation, have in the past demanded long periods of sustained effort; but what was the exception is within sight of becoming the rule. One may expect more and more sharing out of the strain (as on *The Longest Day* and *How the West Was Won*, with their three directors apiece), with the director acting as one of a group of expert technicians rather than as the creative mind behind the picture. Even within the blockbusters, there will be the division between the film which expresses one man's idea of what he wants to put on the screen (and, whatever else, *The Greatest Story* is likely to be that) and the made-to-measure creation by committee.

Over the years, Hollywood has always adjusted its assumptions about the correct length of a film to its ideas of what the audience wanted. The ninety-minute average was not some divinely ordained "right" length for a feature film, but a carefully planned policy to fit movies into a workable release system. Now that the system has more or less broken down and each film is out on its own, left to make its own impression on an audience who were not loyally in their places at the cinema last week, and will probably not be there next week, the conviction grows that what the public wants is length. It's ironic that less than a decade ago, in the early days of blockbusting, *A Star is Born* had to be ruthlessly cut, while at present films are all too obviously being stretched and padded to give them the spurious self-importance of an extra half-hour's running time. But, for all the dead wood on the screen that could so easily be pruned away, Hollywood has not surrendered its knowledge of what its own kind of showmanship is about.

Only "a financially undisciplined business like the movies," says the *Hollywood Reporter*, would put so many of its commercial eggs into so few baskets. In Britain, there has been some restiveness among cinema managers, who no doubt cannot relish a production policy which seems bound to favour large cinemas capable of playing the outside films at the expense of small ones. And the example of Italy, and for that matter of this country, has proved that it's possible to do very adequately at the domestic box-office on a programme of medium-budget productions which spread the risk. Hollywood, however, cannot think in these terms: its gaze is fixed of necessity on a world market. For this industry, in fact, the blockbuster strategy was the logical one; and it would probably be no easier for it to retreat than it would be for a country committed to a nuclear defence policy to think again in terms of conventional weapons. But the risks, all the same, are formidable—not merely to individual companies, which are committing so large a share of their resources to one or two pictures, but to an entire industry whose products still fill 55 per cent of the non-Communist world's cinemas. At the moment, films must be on the drawing-boards which are not going to reach the screen for another four years. To extend Hollywood's own militant terminology, are they going to be a case of Skybolt or Polaris?

II. ON THE SCREEN

NEW INDUSTRY PROBLEMS DEMAND drastic solutions, inevitably placing new demands on the film-makers themselves. It is not the purpose of this article to criticise those directors who have switched from comparatively low-budget productions with, perhaps, off-beat themes to multi-million epics: if they are veterans they are likely to accept the challenge gleefully, for their entire Hollywood careers have been based on an ability to encompass all fashions and styles; and if they belong to the younger generation, they will probably feel that big budgets and lavish facilities provide an opportunity they cannot afford to reject.

But what is the extent of their involvement? We have already pointed to the primary importance of the producer in this kind of endeavour. He must somehow hold his great mammoth together (or, as one Hollywood director once put it, "he is like the captain of a ship which is being built up all around him"). So the director is liable to find himself more subject to his producer's whims (as well as to the behind-the-scenes pressures of accountants and insurance men) than would be the case in normal production. His task is not made easier by the fact that the blockbuster has now worked out a fairly constant format of its own. The narrative must be planned, obviously, to fit in with the big climaxes; but since it is impracticable, and exhausting for even the most eager audience, to think in terms of three hours of continuous fighting or chariot races, other elements have to be introduced. These will include a generally luscious, eye-catching type of decor; a handsome parade of actors capable of making some sense out of often ill-written, antique dialogue; at least one big scene before the interval and a key dramatic moment to round off the first half. The second part will, if possible, be a concentration of real highlights, like the massed armies advancing along the shore in *El Cid* or the fighting around the fort in *The Alamo*.

Even here, the director may only be present in a supervisory capacity. This type of film-making has spotlighted a group of



Bread and circuses: Anthony Quinn in an arena sequence from "Barabba".



The power of the right location. Lawrence (Peter O'Toole) leads his Arab guerrillas in an attack on a train.

backroom talents with a long Hollywood tradition behind them: the second unit directors* who, with their specialist teams of stuntmen, designers and cameramen, are largely responsible for sending the chariots hurtling around the arena or organising the armies for their march on Rome. Nowadays, one has the right to expect that the cinema will manage those spectacular purple passages spectacularly; and if Hollywood cannot bring them off by now, nobody can. They may cost a lot of money but, since they also constitute a large portion of the box-office bait, the objective must be maximum efficiency at all times. If the main director's temperament makes it difficult for him to handle crowds and mass effects, the skill of the second unit can tip the balance between success and failure.

In certain cases, then, the director's real influence and personality is more likely to be found in the manner in which he handles the narrative passages between the climaxes and directs the leading actors in main scenes. The personal shaping of a story-line or the pointing-up of a sequence by a favourite visual effect or nuance are luxuries which have to be fought for, though much will naturally depend upon the degree of his control over production policy. Uncertainties at the top can make his task more difficult, and a particularly edgy producer-director relationship may result in the ship foundering under them both.

The Road to Calvary

WHEN IN DOUBT, USE A well-trying formula. For producers seeking inspiration in a time of crisis, the familiar Hollywood dictum could mean only one thing. The religious spectacle, whether inspired directly by the Bible or by the highly exploitable conflicts of Romans and Christians, is as old as the cinema itself. Hollywood carried on from where the silent

* Some second unit directors and their films: Andrew Marton (chariot race, *Ben-Hur*, *The Longest Day*); Yakima Canutt (*Ben-Hur*, *El Cid*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*); Elmo Williams (battle co-ordination, *The Longest Day*, *The Vikings*); Cliff Lyons (*The Alamo*); Noel Howard (*King of Kings*, *Lawrence of Arabia*); James Havens (*Mutiny on the Bounty*, both versions).

Italians left off, and Cecil B. DeMille converted the formula into his own personal (and profitable) mixture of would-be eroticism and biblical tub-thumping. With wider screens and greater facilities, there seemed no reason why even his grandiose flights of fancy should not be surpassed. And the audience was ready-made, waiting to respond with the proper degree of self-satisfaction to the overwhelming righteousness of it all. The choice of director for these projects, however, has not always followed a predictable course. The veteran professional tends to be given preference (William Wyler, though, made particularly heavy weather of *Ben-Hur*), yet several younger talents have received equal opportunities despite the fact that their record of commercial successes has not been over-large. In their earlier work, Nicholas Ray and Stanley Kubrick emerged as film-makers with a fondness for hard, dramatic subjects with a distinctive brand of character exploration. Finding themselves part of a massive construction job, it was almost inevitable that their personalities should become partly submerged beneath that obligatory crust of fusty and haloed reverence which usually passes for religious feeling in Hollywood's dictionary.

King of Kings was only a partial commercial success, despite a fair amount of violence, a teenage sexpot of a Salome and a keen-eyed visualisation of some scenes. Ray's original conception of Christ as a latter-day Rebel with a Message was full of possibilities, yet he seemed thwarted both by uncertainties within himself and by extensive front-office interference: in the end, the film worked neither for its director nor its audience. Aided (perhaps) by the temperament of Kirk Douglas, their actor-producer, Kubrick and Dalton Trumbo in *Spartacus* found time for liberal parallels about freedom and slavery as well as a parade of elegantly acted perversions. This time the dice fell on the side of the box-office; the audience warmed to the well-staged gladiatorial contests and battles and left the moralising to look after itself.

These films, and their successors, reveal in varying degrees what can happen when artistic allegiances are divided, as they are likely to be in this kind of undertaking. It may be possible to achieve a flow of beautiful and eloquent images given the right set of circumstances; yet, in the final analysis, you are always at the mercy of a Miklos Rozsa score or a production directive which can suddenly slice a key scene in half. And for the producer dealing with the Bible's more explicit pages, there is also the nagging doubt as to whether the adaptation has arrived at an equitable balance between intended licentiousness and the demands of world censorship and markets. (When couched in the unwittingly funny English dialogue of Robert Aldrich's *Sodom and Gomorrah*, deviate moral behaviour just tends to look rather silly, although there are more orthodox compensations in the way of a splendid horse charge shot from a great height and a hand-to-hand duel which is made to look convincingly painful.)

Torture, flagellation, martyrdom in the arena, Crucifixion... It could be argued that it is justifiable to present the violence of a barbarous era in full detail. If one accepts the precept that great artists do not need to show everything, one must equally concede that great showmen *do*—who has ever heard of a restrained circus? Basically these films are a Big Show, and the blockbuster producer would be losing sight of his goal if he did not cultivate violence as one of his supreme assets. Consequently, several films have tried to outbid each other in the graphic presentation of physical pain, which would certainly not be so readily admissible by the censors in modern subjects. The *Ben-Hur* chariot race, with its deafening sound track of pounding hooves and baying crowds, is a *tour de force* of staging (albeit copied from its silent predecessor) which, at the same time, makes a direct appeal to the sadistic responses of its audience. Richard Fleischer's *Barabab* cleverly develops this tendency as well as referring back to *Spartacus* for some of its juiciest ideas. Unlike his more celebrated colleagues, however, Fleischer finds a natural

fascination in the ritualistic elements involved; and he has the enviable American talent of being able to make the sulphur mine episodes and the extremely complex arena scenes really work as big-screen Grand Guignol. Whether one likes it or not (and the mawkish treatment of Barabbas' own story proves a heavy liability), this is superior film-making, confident of its power to disturb an audience, and quite personal in its handling of camera, colour and sound.

Heroes—Ancient and Modern

GIVEN A SUBSTANTIAL BUDGET and a potentially exciting adventure theme, the resourceful director should be able to indulge himself as well as please his public, without having to wonder, as with the biblical subjects, whose religious susceptibilities he may be offending. Anthony Mann's *El Cid* is so well-upholstered that one can clearly see where the money went, and the realisation of the mass scenes really does exploit the potentialities of Super Technirama 70 (a 35mm. CinemaScope extract of the tournament combat in the first half seemed quite pallid in comparison). The film also demonstrates how a large screen can enhance the quality of intelligently used decor. The heavy reds and blacks of the Court interiors, and the castle on the sea-shore with its great open spaces, help to sustain the illusion of a romantic past, derived partly from popular legends and the contemporary comic strip and here dominated by the craggy, all-American presence of Charlton Heston. Critics may wince at historical inaccuracies and at the lines Sophia Loren is forced to speak, but miss the whole point in doing so. This is the kind of film which creates its own make-believe: the formula demands that the characters should be conceived in easily recognisable terms. They are metaphorically stripped for action, as another battle is always just around the corner.

In this respect, the three veteran directors of *How the West Was Won* (Ford, Hathaway, Marshall) toss off their bravura cattle stampedes, Indian attacks and train derailments with the greatest zest and enjoyment; only the critic is likely to complain that the full potentialities of a marvellous subject are never explored. At the moment, Cinerama is the biggest screen of them all. This fact and an all-star cast provide the main selling points, and the inadequacies of a script bereft of real historical sense and peopled by a collection of more or less threadbare characters are not worrying factors of any importance for the audience the show is out to please.

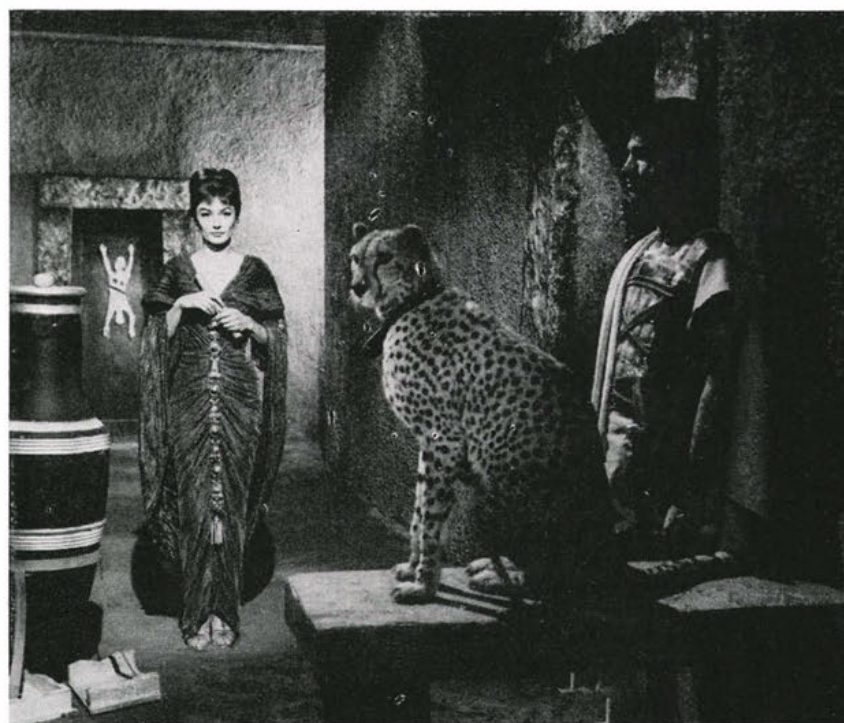
Here perhaps is the crux of the matter. Any genuine appraisal of these films must accept the difference in the "boredom-level" between the audience and the professional reviewer. The public which arrives in coach-loads, family outings and school parties cheerfully accepts the fact that it will be in the cinema for a long time. It is a special kind of audience, much less worried by stretches of tedium and lethargy than the critics, who are liable to make connections and comparisons based on a wider variety of experiences than the average blockbuster offers. But the critic ought not always to expect the worst. The experienced director can usually be relied upon to pull the enterprise through to a successful box-office conclusion; if he is lucky, he may also be able to hint at depths below the surface excitements. Ford's twenty-minute sequence in the Cinerama picture is like a glimpse into a storehouse of rich, private memories. Howard Hawks' *Hatari!* shows how a formidably long running time can be sustained by force of sheer personality and despite a fluctuating script. As it happens, *Hatari!* does not strictly belong to this article's terms of reference. It is not being sold as a blockbuster, nor is it in a widescreen process. Although the film has an abundance of superbly photographed hunting scenes, its overall tone is far too intimate and small-scale to

acquire the necessary status. Yet it is manifestly the work of a single directorial mind, which is more than can be said for the remake of *Mutiny on the Bounty*.

The circumstances surrounding the production of *Mutiny* provide an indication of what can happen when a big picture is beset by warring factions. Begun by Carol Reed, who left after a dispute over policy, it was taken over by Lewis Milestone and other hands and the incomplete script was continually altered during location shooting. In the circumstances, it is not quite such a mess as was anticipated, and its built-in box-office potential, as well as nostalgic memories of Charles Laughton, ought to pull it through. Unlike the original, it wastes a good deal of footage on elaborate scene-setting. Having established the fateful Bligh-Christian conflict with much invective and several explicit whipping scenes, the narrative settles down for an unconscionably long time among the ever-smiling Tahitian girls undulating on sunny beaches. Brando's defiantly star performance swiftly turns the conflict into a clash of classes as well as temperaments. Flaunting an extravagantly foppish English accent, he poses like a Napoleon, dresses like a dandy, and times his verbal effects—his "Goodnight, sir" to Bligh encloses a whole world of contempt—like a precision artist. The closing reels are undeniably Brando's personal property; and here one senses an ego as substantial as the footage which encompasses it. Badly burned in the fire which guts the *Bounty*, Brando-Christian dies slowly on the shore, with long, lingering close-ups of his charred face—but, unhappily, he cannot quite bring it off. The pretence of suffering at great length seems to hold a special attraction for blockbusting stars (witness Kirk Douglas's humiliations and final crucifixion in *Spartacus*), especially when they have a hand in the production. To stay alive with the fans of the Sixties, it is apparently advisable for the modern screen hero to die a grand-scale theatrical death at least once in his career.

Grand Illusions

CHROMIUM-PLATED EXTRAVAGANZAS laced with instant religion, rousing adventure stories designed for all age groups, long-running stage musicals . . . Until a few years ago, the critic could make a fair guess as to what the next blockbuster's



Internationalism. Anouk Aimée, Stanley Baker and leopard in Robert Aldrich's Italian-made "Sodom and Gomorrah".

stock-in-trade would be. Nowadays, the list of possible subjects has widened to take in politics and war guilt (*Judgment at Nuremberg*), nationalism (*Exodus*) and, most recently in *Lawrence of Arabia*, a full-scale character study. What has emerged from this grandiose fusion of eye-appeal and "think" material?

Here, one must revert to the point made earlier regarding the director and the degree of personal control he is able to exert over his material, for the new-style superspectacle can confirm a film-maker's talent (or expose the lack of it) with almost frightening clarity. Darryl F. Zanuck and his squad of company commanders in *The Longest Day* take a slab of recent history and fill it out with enough cosy laughs to soften any uncomfortable audience reaction. Here is a film which offers no clear analysis as to what the war was all about; except for the tough, indomitable American troop leaders, its characters suggest that it was fought by groups of garrulous stereotypes ranging from cheerful, damn-it-all Britishers to a German general staff incoherently at the mercy of a stupid and lazy Hitler. A series of calculated half-truths, in fact, carefully packaged in layers of sentiment and patriotism, are embellished with a mass of documentary detail and some spectacularly staged combat scenes. A score or so of star names obviously helps to make the film work with its huge audience; yet one suspects that its success also has something to do with a popular willingness to see this kind of war as an almost archaic episode from a past which, in this age of nuclear warheads, can never be repeated. Do fathers take their children to show them "what it was like" and, if so, do they accept its attitudes as easily as the kids? "I wonder who won?" asks the young American soldier at the end. Regretfully, one is forced to reply—expediency and a knowing talent for lucrative myth-making.

* * *

An equally perilous barrier exists between the known facts of one man's life and the way he chooses to describe them himself. Robert Bolt, the scriptwriter of the Sam Spiegel-David Lean production of *Lawrence of Arabia*, has written that his intention was to get "at least within hailing distance of the factual truth." But, according to Professor Lawrence's letter about his brother in *The Observer* and Captain Liddell Hart's letter to *The Times*, the film's Lawrence emerges as a stranger to them both, "due to a mistaken diagnosis of character and accompanying distortion of the historical record to serve a dramatic purpose." Add to this numerous protests from the Turks, and the film's reticence in examining the whole question of oil and its control, and you have a work which some would say conceals rather than reveals its hero. But, surely, this might have been expected. It brings up the whole question of how serious and authentic you can afford to be in a form which must, of necessity, take special heed of its audience's needs and expectations.

Most of the film critics' complaints have centred on the fact that at the end the observer is left without a firm picture either of Lawrence's character or of the qualities which made him a leader. One might counter that this would matter less if the film's makers had given real force and density to their own chosen conception of the character. In fact, what emerges most strongly is the physical world which Lawrence discovered and which the film-makers have rediscovered for themselves. Often shooting under extremely difficult conditions, Lean and his camera team find their own mysteries in the harsh, oppressive desert and transform them into stunning visual moments: the black-clad horseman materialising from a mere dot on the shimmering horizon; Lawrence meditating alone in the desert night; a line of camels speeding across the yellow sands. . . . These magisterial locations (cleverly contrasted with the cool, echoing interiors of Army

HQs and government offices) remain firmly in the mind's eye, whereas the personal story and its political connotations blur together into a mirage of indigestible narrative slabs.

Here, as in *Kwai*, one senses the presence of a considerable, if stolid, talent imprisoned within an impeccably academic technique. Apart from an inability to spring the imagination wide, Lean also fails to establish his ambiguous hero within the physical and psychological action of the film. Given marvellous definition and colour, an audience is more easily persuaded to accept illusions of grandeur, especially when backed by a persistent and bombastic score and a lavish deployment of time and space. But, surely, the employment of a more private, yet truly dynamic style need not result in a loss of integrity or a distortion of the subject. Here, despite at least one photographic *coup* (the slow pan across the invaders of Aqaba ending up on the useless Turkish gun pointing out to sea), the action scenes exist only as spectacular set-pieces; and lack, in any case, that extra panache which the best American directors can supply.

Almost inevitably, in a film which flicks over so many pages of history, the main characters tend to become spokesmen for (fabricated?) attitudes rather than fully realised human beings. The Arab characters (as played by Alec Guinness, Anthony Quinn and the excellent Omar Sharif) make the most of Bolt's theatrically effective dialogue, while the central portrait slowly falls victim to the film's indecision. Illuminated with flashes of quixotic humour and insight, Peter O'Toole's Lawrence is always intelligently conceived, even though he seems too lightweight and detached in his search for a vital clue to the character's essence. His task is made more difficult in those scenes where a literal depiction of events needs to be supplemented by a firmer, even if conjectural, point of view. Lawrence kills in cold blood when he has to, and sadly admits he enjoys it. But when captured by the Turkish Bey, does he "enjoy" his treatment as well? At these moments, the script withholds comment to such an extent that the spectator might well be forgiven if he becomes bemused or disinterested. Exhibitionist? Hero? Sadist? Masochist? Tragic victim of bureaucracy? The film spotlights each debatable aspect in turn and finally suggests another interpretation which may, or may not, have been intended: this Lawrence, the secret agent and secret dreamer, was also a bit of a bore.

A debatable film closes, for the time being, a debatable subject. *Lawrence* was sold, quite brilliantly, as the first blockbuster that *everyone* was going to regard as a great film; and it turned out to be . . . a blockbuster. Next stop: *Cleopatra*.

Footnote to the Blockbusters

Dino De Laurentiis has announced directors for several episodes in his fifteen-hour version of *The Bible*, including Visconti for "Joseph and his Brethren". We offer some further suggestions:

<i>The Garden of Eden</i>	ROGER VADIM
<i>Cain and Abel</i>	STANLEY KRAMER
<i>Noah and the Ark</i>	HOWARD HAWKS
<i>Abraham and Isaac</i>	NICHOLAS RAY
<i>The Plagues of Egypt</i>	LUIS BUNUEL
<i>Joshua and the Battle of Jericho</i>	MORTON DACOSTA
<i>David and Goliath</i>	FRANK CAPRA
<i>The Lamentations of Job</i>	MARLON BRANDO (with BRANDO as Job)
<i>Jonah and the Whale</i>	JOHN HUSTON (2nd Unit, J. Y. COUSTEAU)
<i>The Annunciation to the Virgin</i>	ALAIN RESNAIS (script by ROBBE-GRILLET)
<i>Casting out the Money-changers</i>	LINDSAY ANDERSON
<i>The Raising of Lazarus</i>	ROGER CORMAN



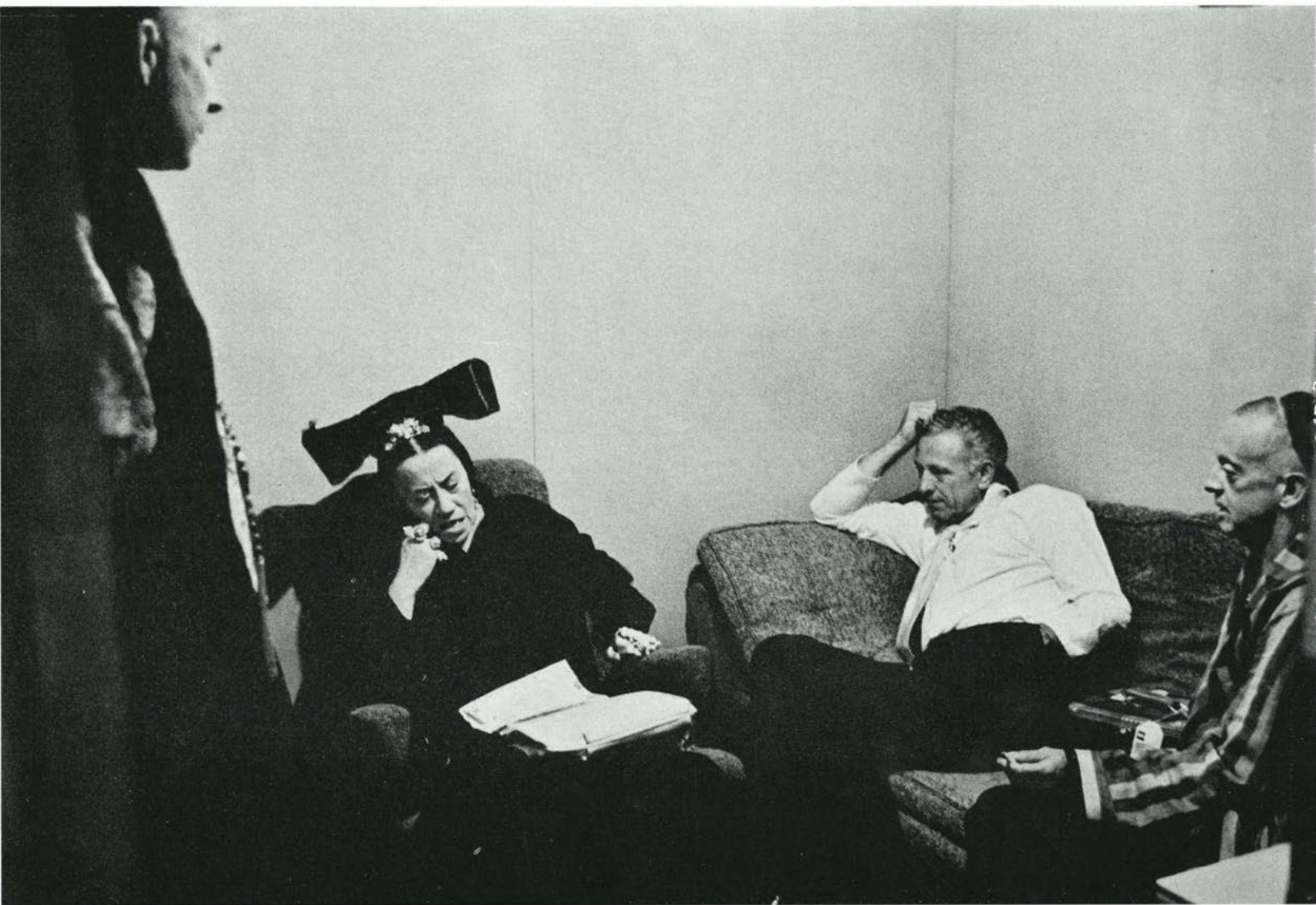
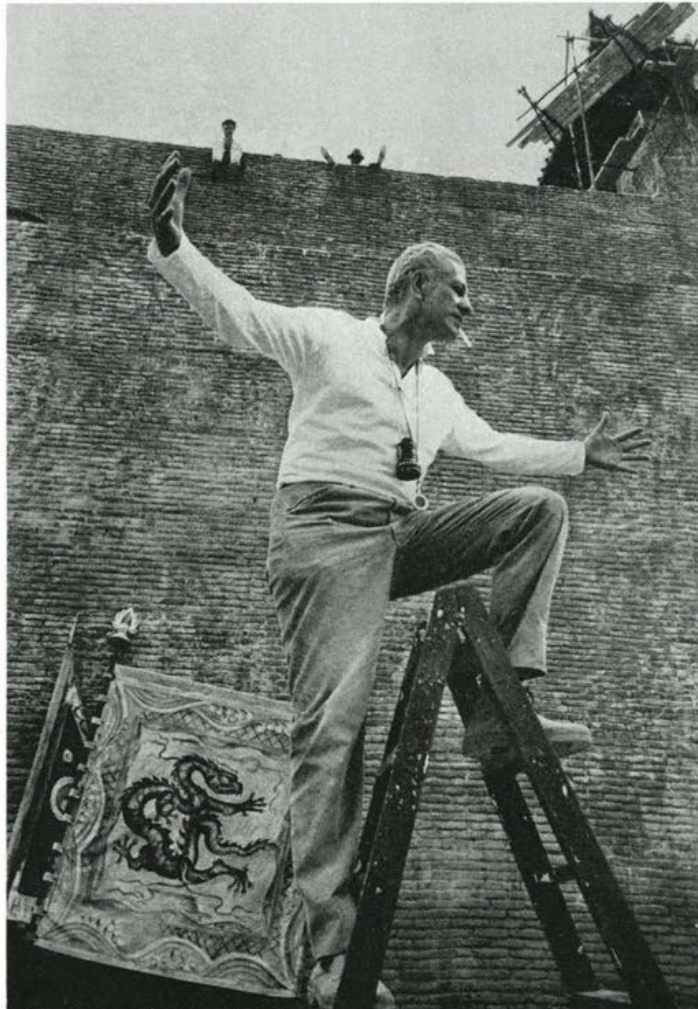
↑ **MAKING A BLOCKBUSTER** ↓

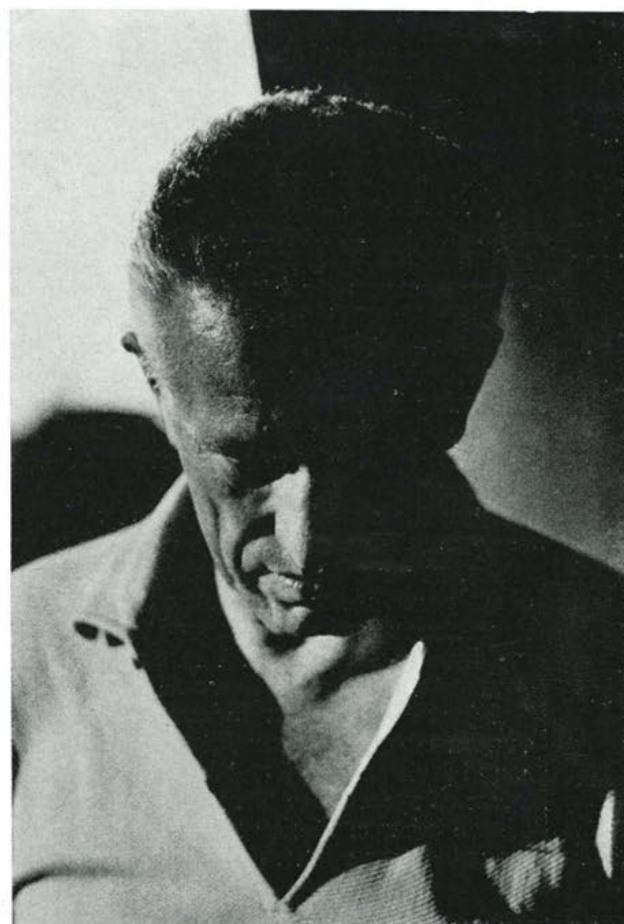
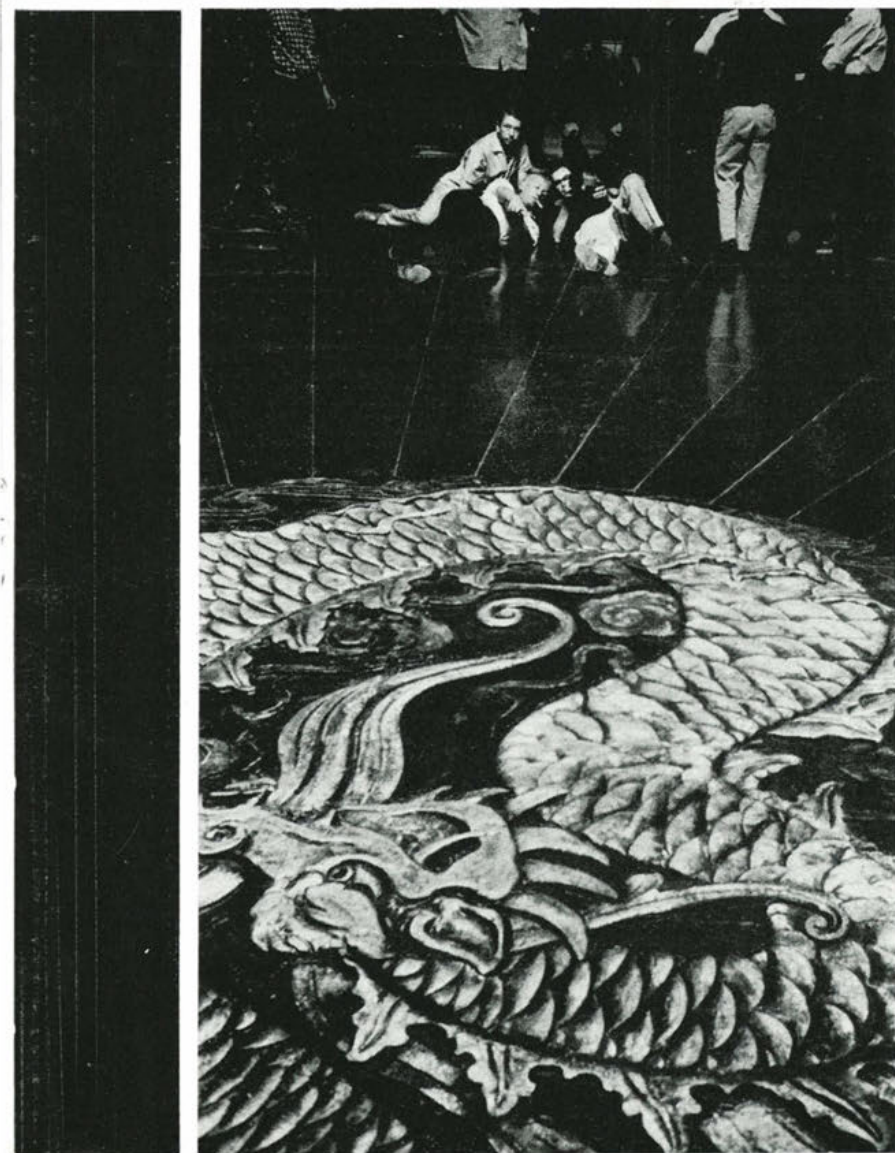
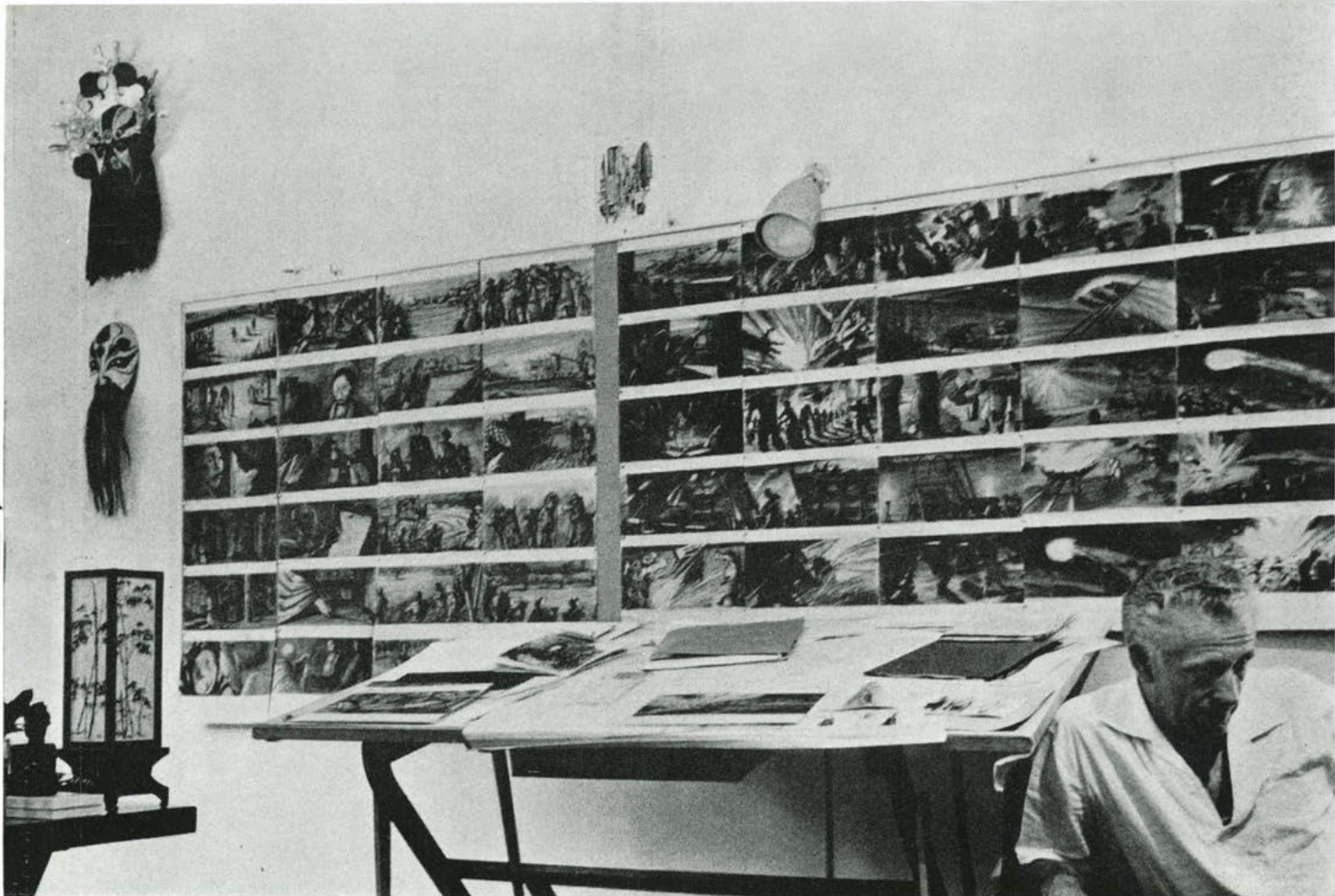
NICHOLAS RAY

at work on
55 DAYS AT PEKING

At Samuel Bronston's studio in Spain, where he made *King of Kings*, Nicholas Ray has been filming the story of the Boxer Rebellion. These photographs of the director at work—with actors, cameraman, production designs—show some of the moods and phases of the creative process. The cast includes Charlton Heston, Ava Gardner, David Niven, Flora Robson (below, and photograph on preceding page) and Robert Helpmann (below, right).

PHOTOGRAPHS
BY DENNIS STOCK
OF MAGNUM





ELECTIVE ● aspects AFFINITIES of *Jules et Jim*



.....
Roger
Greenspun

"Life in 'Jules et Jim' naturally
expands in circles . . ."

*Das Leben war ihnen ein Räthsel, dessen Auflösung
sie nur mit einander fanden.*

Goethe, Elective Affinities, Vol. II, Ch. 17

THE FORMS OF LIFE flourish within the protective circles of François Truffaut's *Jules et Jim*. Whatever is reflected in the kindly eyes of Jules "*comme des boules, pleins d'humour et de tendresse*,"¹ tadpoles squirming in a round bowl of water, the slow sensitive circling of a room by hand-held camera taking careful inventory of the pleasant labours of a reflective and observant man's life—circles enclose to promote and enhance the abundant vitality of this film's world and its creatures. Files of dominoes meander across circular tables. A young woman imitating a locomotive triumphantly puffs her way around Jules's room with a cigarette inverted in her mouth, followed in close-up by a rapidly circling camera. The camera races through an even more rapid circle in a café when the young woman, Thérèse, deserts Jules for another man. But after the camera's dizzy 360° pan Jules sits down, and draws on a round table top the face of another girl he might love. A figure of speech, the "family circle", becomes an image when the camera follows smiling glances from eye to eye at the German chalet. For the ways in which the film sees

life, the cosmos itself according to Catherine's German authority being a great inverted bowl, the growing family ideally nurtures and extends possibility; the family circle can even improve the time, making a balance between an abstract symbol of perfection and all the inevitable signs of dissolution². Finally the protective charm is lost when through the broken arc of a circle, a ruined bridge, Catherine plunges herself and Jim to death.

While life in *Jules et Jim* naturally expands in circles, the patterns human beings impose on it tend often to be triangular. The central *ménage à trois* enforces the idea of a triangle, and in the artful arrangements of characters³ and above all in the opposition of camera lenses to the many corner settings the idea is subtly realised. To be caught in a corner is to be miserable; Jim and Gilberte, who are generally miserable together (and who are rarely alone except in the implicit presence of a third party), are usually to be found in corners—sitting glumly in their café, or lying in Gilberte's bed. In a film so devoted to celebrating the freedom and grace of broadly sweeping movements, and to seeing life, in Albert's ballad for Catherine, as a whirl, the rigid triangular figure, the cramped corner setting, are traps. Typically Catherine, although she never quite succeeds with circles, manages in spite of being repeatedly an impulsive party in a love

triangle, never to be cornered. But often, in the placing of her various beds, in where she sits while the men play dominoes, you will find her up against a wall.

II

Catherine is conjured into view through an insistence upon the powers of seeing. First she is a photograph projected by concentrated light in a darkened room, then a carved stone head in the bright Mediterranean sun, and finally a living presence in a Paris garden. From the first her beautiful smile attracts, and at the end a subdued version of that smile is the last to be seen of her. She flashes the smile most brilliantly during the post-war reunion between Jules and Jim, when she tells Jim that though Jules thinks his future will be bright it may not be spectacular. As it turns out, she makes his future both bright and spectacular. Catherine's last act, the shaping of a destiny, confirms the slightly more than natural role she plays in the film. The enigma within her smile, which defies all the camera's clever attempts to hold it still, ultimately defines her. Jules, who is always willing to establish essences, says she is "*une vraie femme*," but before we are through with her we see the true woman costumed as "Thomas" in pre-war Paris, in high boots for the German countryside, and in extremely mannish shirt and tie in Paris of the 1930s. Various identified as daring thinker, emancipated woman, "true woman", wife, mistress, mother, innovator in love, queen, almost a man—Catherine seems compelled to act out the contradictory impulses implicit in such a confusion of roles.

At their most mysterious the complications in her life serve aspirations towards a higher disorder in natural forces. She appears in a glow of light after a shower of water (in the camera's passage up from a gymnasium shower room, through an overhead glow, into Jules's garden), and after death by drowning she disappears in flame. Her first leap into the Seine produces fiery rings of reflected light upon water⁴. When she pours liquid down a drain, smoke rises up in response. She is more than a little prone to catching fire herself. An enterprising witch, she does very nearly manage to combine fire and water, only to be defeated in each try by the violence of her means. Her direct assaults upon the elements contrast with the imperfect contact the men make, shivering in a shower, playing cautiously with the sea on a sunny holiday, sawing firewood against the winter cold. But those contacts, if not perfectly comfortable, are nevertheless viable, as Catherine's attacks are not. (On one of the best of days, during the foggy walk along the lake, when sky, earth, and water are very close to one another in natural harmony, Catherine has the men skimming stones over the surface of the water.) Attempts to realign the elements, particularly ones so traditionally antithetical as fire and water, produce not a new nature, but rather destruction in this one.

For each of her whims she has a reason: being quits, keeping the balance. Jules has known few women; she has known many men: they might cancel out to make a good pair. A few hours with an old lover before her marriage pays off a few insults from Jules's mother. To justify her infidelities to Jim, "*Gilberte égale Albert*." But Catherine's reasons are never reasonable; being quits shades over into seeking revenge. In this she closely reflects the world in which she lives, imitating in her own sphere some of the statecraft games that modern Europe plays in its sphere, and finally going sour as everything

around her goes insane. The instruments at her disposal increase in potential efficiency, from a quaintly mysterious bottle of vitriol at the beginning to the fatal automobile at the end. In a sense she is doomed by the way in which her wilful inventiveness finds its too ready match in the development of the world's inventions⁵.

Between her delightful "Thomas", who as symbol so strangely moves the young men, and the masculine pose of her last scenes, there are ominous differences—age, increasing respectability, the styles of the times, and above all a simple change in the elements of disguise from a moustache playfully drawn on to a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles. At the end she has lost some of her flair for being a man. She has substituted for it an impressive technical proficiency, which the camera closely records, in handling the knobs and levers of her automobile. Catherine *herself* is a deeply moving symbol, of the eroding demands of simply living (she seems to bear all the burden of ageing in the film), of boredom, of incessant wilful change, of whatever signifies the slipping away of life in time—in the times through which you live and which, with a smile if you are very lucky, will see you to your death. Destructive, with her fires and her burning liquid, desperately asserting balance and yet repeatedly losing it, Catherine is sadly fated at the same time that she seems to *be* fate; hiding behind pencilled moustache, prim spectacles, and a beautiful smile.

Catherine's role as it were emerges from within the mysteries of her appearance. For the two men the conventions of their appearance almost hide the mysterious humanity of their roles. People call them Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and to some degree people are right. But Jim more nearly resembles the type of the Romantic hero—tall, dark, full lips, low voice, cape coat. At times he is betrayed into parodying the type, as in the struggle with Catherine over her pistol and the escape from the old mill. More often, however, he translates the traditional role into what must of course be its modern equivalent: the adventurous pragmatist whose "occupation" consists in seeing for himself, and whose special gift is an appreciation of the influence of conditions.

Jules, the little clown, saddened as his life continues, is



Circles and triangles: Jim, Jules and Catherine on their Riviera holiday.



"The natural world is almost always idyllic . . ."

almost as conventionalised in his appearance, even to wearing the same jaunty striped suit and string tie to his wife's cremation as he had worn for a game of leapfrog with Jim thirty years before, when the film began. He thinks of himself as an absolutist: Catherine *is* a queen; Baudelaire says that woman *is* abominable, and Baudelaire means what he says "metaphysically". Jim succeeds in romantic love; Jules fails. Jim goes exploring (Catherine even tells him to go see for himself what is beyond the earth's crust in her cosmology); Jules, a lovable Buddha, withdraws into contemplation. As he retreats from it a little, Jules's ways of valuing life increase in their scope and coherence. Some day, he says, he may become ambitious and write a love story—about insects. The comment is rueful, but not bitter. The semi-comic frustration of so many of his desires combines with the love with which he approaches his naturalistic researches, to relieve him from the necessity for self-interested involvement in the world he so conscientiously observes. Catherine's last request is that Jim come with her in her automobile, and that Jules watch them carefully.

III

The three central characters largely are defined through the complexity and delicacy of the ways in which the film insists upon seeing them, in relation to a continually widening, life-sustaining round of outside contexts. Jules and Jim are writers and intellectuals, and they do a great deal of quoting and translating. Thérèse disappears while they argue about Shakespeare; Catherine on the other hand teaches all men—about Shakespeare—though she jumps into the Seine after too many quotations from Baudelaire. Jules will translate Jim's autobiographical novel into German, and he does translate Catherine's English quotation from a German author into French for Jim; but later Jim has apparently learned enough German to tell Gilberte that he is translating an Austrian play into French. Jim's very name, pronounced "Djim à l'anglaise," carries over from another language. To the political turmoils

of the great world the interlingual activities of these ideal friends offer an ironic contrast. Literature and translation affirm a community, but *not* a simple identity, of human experience through letters, and show a better way to Frenchman and German than the national aspirations of their two countries. So far as the film's montage presents it, World War One is declared as if to interrupt Jules's rendition of the *Marseillaise* without an accent.

Near the very beginning Thérèse gets things going when she runs away from an anarchist painting a fence slogan that reads "MORT AUX AUTRE(S)". When the two men meet after the war, Jules at once asks, how are the others? A little later he tells Jim to give his regards to the others. The question of "the others" is complicated because while they are the ones who fill the cemeteries, they are also the ones who put them there; they write the books and paint the pictures, but they also burn the books and hate bohemian artists. "The others" are everybody, and they may excite concern, compassion, fear, or loathing. But no matter what the nature of their claim they direct attention to a larger view of the world, a corrective to the tightly involuted emotional tangle that runs through *Jules et Jim*. They are a reminder that beyond the tiring fascination of one woman's shuttling between her men there are other things to look at and care about: people, and in the smallest, most familiar, most surprising ways, the surrounding life of nature.

In the newsreel and old film footage of the First World War there are a few startling moments, during the sequences of horizontal distortion, when flattened soldiers scampering up the barren hills of no man's land look like insects. Later, to signify the end of the war, a field of tall flowers suddenly sprouts helmet-waving soldiers greeting the news of the Armistice. These begin a series of images that continue into the final moments of the film. There is of course some irony in the man-insect relation that pervades the middle portion of the film: Catherine as queen bee of the hive (earlier Jim had said

that marriage made her less of a grasshopper and more of an ant, but it is Jules we shortly see sawing wood with ant-like industry while his wife and best friend kiss in the chalet); the love story about insects; an insect in the background wandering down a windowpane during part of a lyrically romantic sequence, Catherine's and Jim's "*premier baiser, qui dura le reste de la nuit*." The last example is instructive, because Jim's sensitive outlining of Catherine's profile in the half light is not seriously undercut by the insect's tentative journey; rather the two explorations are complementary in their delicacy.

The most important thing about the encompassing plant life is that it does totally surround; that it so interpenetrates the film's action that a fern branch comes naturally to Catherine's hand during her long night talk with Jim, or that the way of knowing the time or kind of day is to observe the quality of light upon trees—the early morning light on dense leaves near a window to mark the ending of Catherine's and Jim's first night; the harmonious misty closeness of trees, land, sky and water during the peaceful visit to the lake. Quietly significant moments for people seem to include plants: a vase full of them by Catherine's head as she sings her ballad, another vase beside her and Sabine as they sit knitting while the men play dominoes. The cremation sequence opens through a shot of funeral palms.

Although it includes death the natural world is almost always idyllic. At their best—a meal in Jules's Paris garden before the war, the south of France, much of the time spent in the German countryside—the affairs of human beings approximate that idyllic order. When they do not, the advantage always lies with nature. Towards the end of the film Jim concedes the failure of his and Catherine's attempt to live by new laws.⁶ The trouble with espousing any kind of revolutionary change is that it implicitly puts one in opposition to an environment that in all aspects demonstrates the rightness of gradual evolution. Tadpoles, insects, plants—all offer a lesson in the survival of ancient forms. Whatever thrives lives peacefully; flower-pattern shell bursts that destroy the land prohibit life.

IV

Truffaut has compared his films with circuses:

My films are circus shows, and that's what I want them to be . . . I'd like people to boo the sequences that have gone wrong and clap the ones they enjoy. And since people who come to see my films have to shut themselves up in the dark, I always like at the end to take them out into nature—to the sea, or the snow—so that they'll forgive me.⁷

Quite apart from the sophistications inherent in the relation Truffaut sees between audience and film (and apart from the charm of thinking of the final scenes of *Les quatre cents coups* and *Tirez sur le pianiste* as nature excursions), the idea of a circus show with its open assumption of putting on an act is especially relevant to *Jules et Jim*. Thérèse's locomotive act, Jules's and Sabine's equestrian act, Catherine's sloppy kid costume for "Thomas", the old film slapstick behind the opening titles, the elaborate double take of Jules' and Jim's Paris reunion near the end—all these suggest two frames of reference; one looking inward to the development of the film's action, and the other looking outward to an emerging insistence upon an idea of "theatre" as such. It is crucial to the film's method that it call attention to the various arts and their kinds (in houses, bridges, songs, statues, plays, paintings, novels, poems, films,

etc.) so that it may make allusion to them when it wishes, and ultimately so that it may add all of them to the demonstration of marvellous diversity that is its meaning.

For a small example of the method, consider a very minor vignette. While the camera circles Jules's room in the introduction to the German chalet, Catherine's voice explains the arrangements of the household. At one point she mentions a local girl who comes in to help with the housework and serving, and the camera lifts slightly to observe on the wall a small painting of a girl and a man kissing. Obviously the point is not that Jules and the girl are having an affair (the painting has already been seen in Jules's Paris apartment); it is rather that just in passing here is a way of thinking about young servant girls established in the conventions of genre painting. The reference has nothing more to say about the girl; its context is not her life, but the life of art. While a voice describes the way things are, the camera finds for them a pictorial tradition.

There are other still pictures: drawings of spiders, Jules as a Romantic Mozart, posters advertising art exhibits and films, Jules's period photographs of German beauties, Albert's slide collection of odd stone faces, the many Picassos, snapshots of Jules and Jim miserable in their uniforms, and of course still photographs made by stopping the moving pictures. There is even a sense in which moving pictures themselves are remarkable for being pictures that move, as in the curious conclusion to Jim's account of a soldier who in the midst of the Great War won a girl by letter, only to be killed before he could consummate his love:

I will show you a series of photos of him . . . if you look at them quickly, he seems to move.

The story about the soldier and his personal combat is one of several more formal tales: Thérèse's story of her adventures, Jim's autobiographical novel, Catherine's side of the story of her marriage with Jules, Jim's account of how he came to his profession, the story of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, *Elective Affinities*. The "story" of *Jules et Jim* both contains and stands in series with all the many stories that are told in the course of the film. The exceptional persistence of a narrator's voice itself draws attention to the integrity of narrative with its typical resources and devices. Thus "story",



Jim (Henri Serre) helps Catherine (Jeanne Moreau) after one of her efforts at destruction by fire.

like "motion picture", is one aspect of the total film. Stories even have a special function of their own; an inartistic function by most modern judgment. Stories are for moral lessons: Jules's little fable of the ruler who was unhappy because he had two wives, Jim's indictment of Catherine based upon the story about a woman on a ship who wanted always to make love to a new stranger, the questionable morality of the Scandinavian dramatist who wallows in vice to preach virtue, what Baudelaire or Shakespeare teach, the significance of burning the books.

While literature teaches us the life of right conduct and tells us how to prepare for its trials, the visual arts, including the art of the film in historical perspective, give us a sense of style—a feeling for the ways in which we may most gracefully come to terms with the imperfections of external reality. A general notion of the efficacy of style as such seems to be behind all the demonstrations of particular styles of film-making, periods of Picasso, fashions in dress, even parodies of sculptural style in Albert's slide collection and in the outdoor museum. To the major subject of the relation between art and life, the film brings a new appreciation of the old aesthetics according to which the dual functions of a work of art are to instruct and to delight. Sound and sight, story and picture, example and image, learning and pleasure—related pairs that not only help explain but in their very doubleness construct the world of *Jules et Jim*.

Jules watches the time pass through a triangular-circular hour glass that tells him when he is to do—whatever it is he wants to do when he turns it over to apportion the day to his own needs and uses. This combination of geometric figures, like an accommodation of time's demands to the expression of personal vitality, seems a characteristic symbol for Jules, who wants Catherine and Sabine and Jim, and will do whatever he can not to see his circle disintegrate. While Catherine's fantastic, boring, sometimes frantic plans to force new combinations fail (though even as they fail they disclose at least a perverted understanding of her world's demands, if not its methods), Jules's quiet, intelligent, flexible inclusion of as much as possible within the circle of his nurture succeeds as well as anything can succeed in an existence in which personal visits to cemeteries must follow the larger actions.



The narrator says that after Catherine and Jim were cremated Jules might have mingled their ashes, but chose not to. At the end, close but separate, and not scattered over everything as Catherine wanted hers to be, their remains seem deeply and a little humorously a memorial to the best of the film's values. All the genuine combinations of this film, even the unsuccessful ones, are happy in some degree. German and French, short and tall, fair and dark, withdrawn and involved—Jules and Jim preside over a world of valuable disparities. Given the demands of the fiction and of the life it portrays, Jules's heroic attempt to hold all things together, no matter how ill sorted, is bound to fail. But beyond the fiction there can be at least momentary success for an analogous attempt in the privileged universe of a work of art. The burden of a work that is so at pains to distinguish the integrity of each of its several elements is exactly a love of multiple relations, tolerance, elemental order, gradualism, plenitude, the inclusion of all of "*les autres*". Upon the contrapuntal inventions of this Solemn Music neither any one nor any other, nor the submergence of one into another, but *all* the several forms and creatures that squirm, struggle, dance into life, in this great sustaining bowl their mixt power employ.

NOTES

- (1) Where possible I quote from Henri-Pierre Roché, *Jules et Jim* (Gallimard, 1953).
- (2) As an idea "circle" is amenable to punning application—like the fantastic proliferations of the ideas of "black and white" in *Tirez sur le Pianiste*. The circles actually formed in the film are always either accidents of movement or observation, or properties of the most unremarkable objects. Nobody sets about drawing a circle or purposefully transcribing one with his movements. But in one of the most poignant moments Jim looks down from his bedroom window upon Catherine's automobile, with no visible driver "*comme un cheval sans cavalier, comme un vaisseau-fantôme*," weaving in and out among a planting of trees each set off by a circular grid surrounding it. The mysterious convolutions of the automobile continually approach but never complete a circular pattern; the riderless horse, the ghost ship, inevitably foreshadow death.
- (3) Some of these arrangements as they manifest themselves in the placings of Jules, Jim, and Catherine on the various levels of the German chalet are discussed in *Cahiers du Cinéma* No. 129 by Michel Delahaye, who is however concerned to annex them to an elaborate plan of formal inversions in language, images, and roles that he finds working in the film.
- (4) Michel Delahaye discusses these images; their importance is confirmed by Truffaut himself in a New York interview described by Dwight MacDonald in *Esquire*, September 1962.
- (5) It is symptomatic of the film's mild fatalism that the only alternative to Catherine's mode as woman is sadly out of date. Thérèse is very appealing, and she manages to win a few symbolic victories that are never possible for Catherine. Running from the fat anarchist as soon as he breaks off an embrace to paint a political slogan, she signals her dissociation from the world's dull intrigues. Though she runs from man to man at least as impulsively as Catherine does, she is not bothered with rationalising or trying to keep an impossible balance. She is an innocent adventuress leading a life of pure escape—which nevertheless betrays her into some sinister compromises. She is committed to life, but married to an undertaker. She conspires in the degeneration of her kind of "adventure", which essentially belongs to the romantic fantasies of the previous century, to the trivial level of the Sunday magazine. Presumably her ignorance of all this is her bliss.
- (6) When Catherine drives to her death over the bridge she proves a point. In attempting to defy existing rules she has gone too far; her last wild act enslaves her to a very old law: gravity. She proves in effect that her own cockeyed physics must follow the same principles as everybody else's; and this is what the film's impressive natural morality demands.
- (7) From an interview translated from *France Observateur* in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Winter 1961-62.

Jules (Oskar Werner), Jim and Thérèse (Marie Dubois).

CAST A COLD EYE



THE FILMS OF BILLY WILDER

Charles Higham

TOGETHER WITH ALFRED HITCHCOCK, Billy Wilder remains the English-speaking cinema's most persistently cynical director. His laughter at humanity, smartly bantering in his scripts written with Charles Brackett and others during the Thirties, savage and wounding in the series of major works culminating in *Ace in the Hole* (1951) has sounded increasingly hollow in recent years; and in his latest film, *One, Two, Three*, the hectic pace, the parade of relentless chatterboxes, quite failed to conceal the inner nihilism, the impatience and contempt for the audience. Wilder has always savaged those unsophisticated people who make up the majority of his audience, aiming instead at a jaded and world-weary minority. One suspects that today he has ceased to care a great deal about even this section of the public.

Wilder has been one of a handful of Hollywood directors whose films express an individual philosophy, and between 1934 and 1951 the development of a personal outlook could be charted. Before the war, he was working in the tradition of the Viennese operetta he knew as a boy, a tradition in which life was a frivolous amusement, the class barriers were broken down, and the wishes of the underprivileged were glamorously fulfilled. Taxi-drivers and chorus girls hobnobbed almost effortlessly with the rich, who unbent over glasses of champagne to the tune of a Strauss waltz. Not a hint of reality intruded into this dream world, whose rules and artifices Wilder recaptured in *Music in the Air*, *Champagne Waltz*, *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* and the elegantly droll *Midnight*.

This mode ceased to amuse in 1939, and Wilder and Brackett charted its disappearance in *Arise My Love* (1940), set against a collapsing Europe, and *Hold Back the Dawn* (1941) in which a gigolo (Charles Boyer) who could well have figured in any of the comedies of the Thirties, is discovered trying to get into the United States via Mexico by cynically marrying an innocent American schoolteacher. *Hold Back the Dawn* is full of speeches in praise of the Land of the Free; and *The Major and the Minor* (1942), set in a plush New York hotel, a fine express train, and an Iowa town where houses are Home Beautiful and the local military academy is lavishly upholstered by Hans Dreier, confirms the immigrant European's enchantment with the New World.

Disillusion sets in with *Double Indemnity* (1943), set in a shabby and dusty Los Angeles villa, a cheap apartment, a hideous insurance office, while *The Lost Weekend's* vision of New York remains among the most unsparing ever recorded on film: a nightmare of litter-strewn streets, a cluttered apartment looking on to a desolate stone wilderness, the elevated clanging across Third Avenue in the dirty light of a summer morning. *Sunset Boulevard*, again set in Los Angeles, evokes an old Hollywood with cockroaches in the interstices, a new one stupefyingly vulgar and brash. *Ace in the Hole*, framed desolately in and around Albuquerque, seems to be taking place at the end of the world.

Above. "Sunset Boulevard": the end of Joe Gillis.



Francis Lederer, Mary Astor, Claudette Colbert and (at separate table) John Barrymore, in a scene from "Midnight".

In the major works made in the eight years between 1943 and 1951—the years on which Wilder's critical reputation chiefly rests—his vision grows increasingly more distinct. The world is ugly and vicious, selfishness and cruelty are dominant in men's lives. Greed is the central impetus of the main characters; and even the walk-ons—the waiter who serves the alcoholic writer Don Birnam a gin-vermouth in *The Lost Weekend*, or the tailor's assistant in *Sunset Boulevard*—are cruel. Bim Nolan, the male nurse in *The Lost Weekend*, isn't simply a male nurse, impersonal, tough and efficient, but a simpering homosexual sadist: leaving Birnam in the alcoholic ward in the early hours of a Sunday morning, he says: "It's like the doctor was just telling me, delirium is a disease of the night—goodnight!" and allows Birnam to endure the screams of a delirium tremens victim. Another example of Wilder's attitude to people occurs in the same film, when Birnam staggers along Third Avenue to try to pawn his typewriter. In Charles Jackson's novel, two men see Birnam trying desperately to gain admittance to a locked-up shop, and one of them snarls: "What's the matter with you, it's Yom Kippur!" Wilder, with Brackett's assistance, adds a characteristic joke. Don says, "What are you talking about, how about Kelly's? How about Gallagher's?" The man replies: "They're closed too. We've got an agreement. They keep closed on Yom Kippur and we don't open on St. Patrick's day!"

In this forbidding world populated by malevolent strangers, parasites or useless do-gooders, Birnam, Chuck Tatum in *Ace in the Hole*, Walter Neff in *Double Indemnity* and Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard* become increasingly isolated from reality, driven by obsessive lusts—for alcohol, for money, for a comeback to the big time. All are weak: Birnam is a failed writer, Tatum a failed journalist, Neff a failed insurance man who cheats his boss, Desmond a failed actress who also has failed as a writer with a botched scenario of *Salome*. Except for Birnam, who is given a fresh chance, these people destroy themselves, die or go mad, and whether it's Edward G. Robinson's insurance boss in *Double Indemnity* or Hedda Hopper's ferocious impersonation of herself in *Sunset Boulevard*, there is always someone around at the end to provide a pitiless final comment.

Even a love relationship—that release which Hollywood has usually granted even its most jaded creatures—is denied Wilder's people, and the sexual relationships in his films have a peculiar insect-like quality: the matings of praying mantises. The parallel is exact in *Double Indemnity*, in which the heartless ex-oilman's wife destroys the insurance salesman through his sexual appetite for her. In *Sunset Boulevard*, the relationship

between the star and the young writer shows barely a hint of anything that is not ravaging and predatory. The sexual encounters between Tatum and his girl in *Ace in the Hole* are observed with austere disgust, and are concluded when the girl plunges a pair of scissors into Tatum's back. The vision of human love is as desolate as the vision of business and of the masses at play.

Inevitably with such an attitude, Wilder seems now to have reached the fag-end of disillusionment. His last two films, *The Apartment* and *One, Two, Three*, are strenuous entertainments in which the horrifying nature of the backgrounds—an icily impersonal New York office, a Berlin stripped of even a vestige of elegance and beauty—and the ugliness of Wilder's life-vision corrode the brain. The conversation of Wilder's people could not be more depressing, centring as it does on sex and money, sprinkled with stag-party jokes, dedicated to a soulless conformism of outlook. Without the artistry that informed his work before 1951, Wilder's films present a uniquely disagreeable image of a man who sees nothing but evil in life, and is amused at it. Yet the works of art remain, and his place in the history of the cinema is secure.

* * *

Wilder's early career as a sports and crime reporter on Viennese and Berlin newspapers during the Twenties, his work as a Berlin cabaret entertainer, fashioned the outlook which in the last twenty years has turned sour; and in many ways the most characteristic Wilder films have sprung from a crime reporter's view of life. His first script was for *People on Sunday* (1928), a half-comic, half-melancholy little fable about four young middle-class people spending a day at the Wannsee. Robert Siodmak directed, and Fred Zinnemann, Edgar G. Ulmer and Eugene Shuftan also worked on the production. Some script work on *Emil and the Detectives* followed, and about fifty vanished scenarios for obscure UFA films of the period. Then, in Paris, Wilder directed *Mauvaise Graine*, with Danielle Darrieux: this film, too, seems to have disappeared. Arriving in Hollywood an unknown, Wilder hawked story ideas for two years (and even took a job as a stunt man), before selling two synopses in a washroom to a Paramount producer. By 1934 he was on the payroll, producing scripts to suit the studio's policy of escapist entertainment set in European high-life.

Many of Wilder's scripts from this period still remain



Ginger Rogers in her teenage disguise in "The Major and the Minor".

fresh, and of his work between 1934 and 1937, *Music in the Air*, directed by Joe May, and *Champagne Waltz*, directed by A. Edward Sutherland, released at the beginning and end of the period respectively, are probably the most rewarding. *Music in the Air* has as its central figure a fascinating embryo Norma Desmond, played with immense virtuosity by Gloria Swanson, as a prima donna who reduces everyone around her to nail-chewing desperation with her tantrums and frenzied self-admiration. Wilder's script (with Howard Young) is already crammed with characteristic touches. The plot-line is a safe hack job: two simple Bavarian villagers (June Lang and Douglass Montgomery) arrive in Munich and pair off with John Boles, Swanson's leading man, and Swanson herself, thereby breaking up the most celebrated love affair on the European opera stage: the exchange of partners predictably makes each of the quartet see where his real affections lie. This sliver-thin story serves as an excuse for some brilliantly written set-pieces: the irruption of the prima donna into a music publisher's office with her mate and co-star, the pair ripping off a complete rehearsal of their new opera with deafening brio; or a speech on amateurism in the theatre delivered by a temperamental conductor (Joseph Cawthorn). The devastating mockery of opera's more fatuous conventions remained practically unique in a Nelson Eddy-Jeanette MacDonald age until *Citizen Kane*.

Champagne Waltz (1937) shows Wilder's unashamed philistinism, this time in a spoofing of ragtime and the Viennese waltz tradition, both of which were enjoying a vogue when the film was made. Buzzy Bellew (Fred MacMurray), conductor of the Tiger Jazz Band, arrives in Vienna on tour, thereby threatening the business of a *Walzpalast* where Franz and Elsa Strauss, scions of the celebrated family, have previously been earning their living. The story develops out of the conflict between jazz and opera (Elsa, like her predecessor in *Music in the Air*, is a temperamental prima donna) and the situations come at breakneck pace, working toward a reconciliation in New York where, in a very Wilderian scene, Buzzy is found conducting a wretched supper-band and Elsa in her *Walzpalast* is the toast of New York. A dream sequence, in which Johann Strauss plays the Blue Danube (for Franz Joseph), and a ruthless shot of the Tiger Jazz Band members twitching like spastics in the middle of a ghastly trained seal act, bear the unmistakable Wilder stamp.

Bluebeard's Eighth Wife (1938) united Wilder for the first time with a man of comparable talent: Charles Brackett, a 46-year-old former theatre critic of *The New Yorker* and a novelist (*That Last Infirmary*, *American Colony*). Though Brackett undoubtedly contributed sparkle and brio (and a partial counterbalance, probably, to Wilder's jaded vision), the dominant personality in the partnership was always Wilder's, and on the evidence of their films made solo, the philosophy was Wilder's and Wilder's alone. Writing for Lubitsch or Leisen, the pair achieved some of the most delectable comedies of the Thirties—artificial, witty, and springing from a world which, if it ever existed, has vanished for ever.

Until an ugly last reel set in a mental institution, Lubitsch's *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* has an agreeably feline asperity. The opening sequence is directed with great zest, cynicism and assurance. Brandon (Gary Cooper) is a millionaire who believes that the male pyjama business is based deliberately on a false hypothesis: in his view, men only wear the top halves. Convinced the public is being taken for a ride, he expounds his theory to a bewildered Riviera shop assistant. The assistant goes to the first floor to talk to his department manager, the two men's expostulations and grimaces observed through plate-glass doors. In dumb show, they go up to see the vice-president, and he in turn telephones the president, who is dressed only in a pyjama jacket. Embarrassment is averted at the last minute by the arrival of an impoverished French noblewoman (Claudette Colbert) who buys the trousers only for her father because he cannot afford the jacket.



"Double Indemnity": wife (Barbara Stanwyck), insurance salesman (Fred MacMurray) and victim.

The subsequent marriage of the millionaire and the impoverished lady is dealt with quietly and elegantly by Lubitsch, who rather softens the script's edge. But Wilder's personality shows through in the character drawing, particularly that of the prize-fighter, brilliantly played by Warren Hymer, who is hired by the wife to beat up her husband. In one scene, Hymer expostulates on the pleasures of being K.O'ed: "You dream of Japan, pink cherry-blossoms, Constantinople... I tell you, Mrs. Brandon, you get to see all those places you could never otherwise afford to visit." The last scenes in a sanatorium are evidently the result of Wilder's participation in the script, and show him at his worst: the inmates are cruelly observed, and there is an inexcusable final shot in which the hero wriggles out of a straitjacket to take the heroine into a typically jaded last minute clinch. A ruthless modern variant on *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife* remains an essentially bitter comedy, wrapped in Lubitsch cellophane.

In 1939, *Ninotchka* and *Midnight* were released: both set in Paris, they showed Wilder and Brackett at the top of their form. Directed with wonderful sparkle and charm by Lubitsch, beautifully played by Garbo and Melvyn Douglas, *Ninotchka* poked fun at Russian commissars, American expatriates, Parisian sophisticates, and the usual assortment of hotel clerks, taxi-drivers and bell-hops who grimaced their way through the comedies of the Thirties. *Midnight* was easily *Ninotchka's* equal, but has been almost totally forgotten perhaps because its director, Mitchell Leisen, has never been a critic's pet. The film's origins in Viennese operetta, its whipped-cream-and-Apfelstrudel view of life, put it in a class with *Music in the Air* and *Champagne Waltz*. Splendidly upholstered in the best Paramount-Hans Dreier tradition, it gives a stylised but penetrating exposition of an upper class that vanished almost immediately after the film was completed, with the outbreak of World War Two. The parallel with Renoir's *La Règle du Jeu*, made in the same year and on much the same territory, hardly needs stressing.

The story is a perfect example of quasi-Viennese nonsense: a fugitive American chorus-girl on the make in Europe (Claudette Colbert) arrives broke in Paris from Monte Carlo, after somehow smuggling herself on to the train in full evening dress. Meeting taxi-driver Don Ameche (as unlikely a hackie as Paul Lukas in *Decision Before Dawn*), she persuades him to drive her around the Paris night-spots while she auditions in each as a singer. Mercifully, we are spared examples of her efforts (except for a brief dying chord heard off-screen) and, still unemployed, she escapes from Ameche's by this time amorous clutches to wander into a superbly funny piano recital in a smart hotel. She sits next to a lecherous



"Ace in the Hole": Kirk Douglas as Chuck Tatum, the reporter in relentless pursuit of a scoop.

John Barrymore: he sizes her up expertly as, thinking herself unobserved, she blissfully removes her shoes. He pockets one. "I had an idea you had an idea," she tells him later.

After the recital, Colbert joins Barrymore, his wife (played with glittering malice by Mary Astor) and his wife's lover (Francis Lederer) at a classic card game during which she announces herself as Baroness Czerny. Lederer insists on escorting her to her hotel and, in a wonderfully played and written scene, leaves her safe at the bedroom door. Next morning, after she has spent a chaste but luxurious night in her suite, Barrymore arrives. He tells her that he knows she is a fake, but offers to pay good money if she will continue the deception, thereby provoking his wife's jealousy in an effort to win her back from her lover.

Colbert obligingly goes for a weekend to his country mansion (the parallel with *La Règle du Jeu* is once more remarkable), while Don Ameche and the entire Paris taxi-force look for her. When she's located, Ameche arrives disguised as Baron Czerny, at the height of a party during which Hedda Hopper leads the conga line with irresistible élan. Next morning there is a breakfast table sequence during which Ameche goes incredulously to the telephone to answer a long-distance call from his "daughter", supposedly measles-stricken in Hungary. There's a "little girl" voice on the line which actually belongs to John Barrymore, hilariously impersonating the non-existent infant on the telephone. Brittle, heartless and stylish, this film remains one of the peaks of Wilder's career.

* * *

Some less impressive films followed, suggesting that Wilder and Brackett were marking time. *What a Life* (1939) is the least characteristic: based on a Henry Aldrich Broadway farce, it is set in a college where the tougher sophomores bully the naïve hero, who of course gets the girl. Towards the beginning the bullying and crude college japes have a characteristic cruelty; after that the film, fluently and persuasively directed by Jay Theodore Reed and wittily acted by Betty Field as the hero's girl friend, becomes very good entertainment. *Ball of Fire* (1940), directed by Howard Hawks, re-writes the old nightclub-girl-meets-professor story in sometimes witty terms. *Arise My Love* and *Hold Back the*

Dawn, both directed by Mitchell Leisen, begin promisingly with racy and amusing situations, then suddenly deteriorate. The first starts with a girl reporter (Colbert) rescuing a flier (Ray Milland) from a firing squad in Spain. After some sharp observation of Europe in decline (the film was criticised at the time for bad taste), things become increasingly dull and repetitious. *Hold Back the Dawn* also starts well. In Mexico, two stranded immigrants, a wildly improbable Australian (Paulette Goddard) and a Rumanian gigolo (Charles Boyer) are reunited; at Goddard's suggestion, Boyer sets out to find a simple American girl to marry so that he can cross the border. He settles on a schoolteacher (Olivia de Havilland), ruthlessly seduces her, and embarks on a union as thorny as the Cooper-Colbert marriage in *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*. The familiar Wilderian situation of the decadent European being snared by the apparently innocent American is amusingly exploited in the early scenes, but after that the writers seem to tire of the whole thing and only Leisen's unfailingly skilful direction keeps it going to the fadeout.

The Major and the Minor was Wilder's first job as a director; and the first sequences clearly show his hand. The film opens with a scalp-treatment demonstrator (Ginger Rogers) arriving at a New York hotel to massage a businessman's head, only to find herself being predatorily chased around the settee. Leaving the building in high dudgeon, she quells a lift-boy's eye-rollings by cracking an egg on his head. Disillusioned and beat-up, Ginger hies home to her Iowa mother (unforgettably played by Mrs. Rogers), disguising herself as a 12-year-old brat complete with pigtails, apple and balloon adventurously snatched from a child bystander. Adopted by an army major (Ray Milland) on the train, she is taken to his home and quickly summed up by his kid sister, wittily played by Diana Lynn. Although it flags slightly in the second half, this is a rather Sturges-like comedy with an agreeable edge.

A potboiler, *Five Graves to Cairo*, was followed by *Double Indemnity*, scripted with Raymond Chandler's assistance from James M. Cain's novel. Perhaps the purest, the least compromised and sensationalised of all Wilder's films, *Double Indemnity* retains an undiminished power. Its story of an insurance salesman driven to murder by an attractive woman is written and directed with relentless assurance from the credits, with a shadowy figure (the murder victim) limping camerawards, to the final sequence in which the salesman returns, bleeding to death, to his office to dictate the story into a machine. Aided by John F. Seitz's harsh photography, Wilder liverishly explores a world shorn of beauty and decency. The tension, the sense of futility as the lovers realise they've committed murder for nothing—they can't get the insurance money—is pitilessly developed.

Several sequences stand out: the desolate Chinese Chequers game played by the wife (Barbara Stanwyck) and her step-daughter; the wife's appearance at the insurance office after the killing, lying desperately, exchanging almost imperceptible glances with her lover; the killers' meeting in the supermarket, she implacable in white sweater and dark glasses, he nervous and irritable, arguing in whispers across the bean-cans; the desperate attempt to start the car when it stalls after a murder which has been entirely conveyed though the expression on the wife's face; the lovers' final showdown in a shuttered room. The whole film is pitched deliberately in a minor key, understressed, to convey the pettiness of the crime, the sadness that seems to hang around enterprises of this kind; and the use of a beautifully detailed sound track, especially in interiors, as well as the concentrated playing of Fred MacMurray and Barbara Stanwyck, ensure one's sense of involvement. The wife's cheap anklet, fluffy slippers, habit of drinking iced tea in tall glasses; the shoddy Spanish-style villa she inhabits; the dusty streets of Los Angeles with their scrubby palms, all become real and alive in a way which immediately establishes Wilder's command of physical detail.

This mastery was to be as strikingly displayed in his next film *The Lost Weekend* (1945), set in an equally brutal and

heartless urban world. Don Birnam is a once promising writer whose inner conflicts (in Charles Jackson's novel, he is a homosexual) drive him to the bottle. Apart from a clumsily introduced flashback showing how he met his girl friend (Jane Wyman), the script concentrates on Birnam during four days of agony, following him to a hospital, his favourite bar, dirty streets and rooms dominated by huge foreground objects—in one memorable shot, a fallen standard lamp. There are some irritating concessions to box-office (notably a floozie, played by Doris Dowling, who flirts with Birnam) and some unnecessarily sensationalised episodes underlined by Miklos Rozsa's raucous score. But the long episodes in which Birnam is alone obviously fascinate Wilder the most, and these are observed with cold detachment: the famous sequence of Birnam's D.T.'s, seeing a bat pounce on a mouse, the blood trickling down the wall (this was deleted in England), is ferociously directed; a hangover is masterfully conveyed in a single giant close-up of one of his eyes. The camera noses about everywhere, into a whisky glass as Birnam expatiates on the splendours evoked by alcohol in a speech which develops Warren Hymer's in *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*; along the bar with its glittering liquor-rings; through the refuse of Third Avenue, the elevated clanging and swaying overhead. One virtuoso sequence takes place in Harry and Joe's Bar, Birnam stealing a purse, a sad little pianist moaning *Louise*, then the waiter throwing him out as the pianist leads the crowd in *Somebody stole my purse!* The Wilderian version of people's reaction to a man desperately sick and in need of help is as cruel as ever: the odiously jocular male nurse ("Good morning, Mary Sunshine!"), the people in Harry and Joe's, the bystanders on Third Avenue. All these people are brilliantly sketched in, scrupulously directed and played, whereas the limp, indifferent figures of Birnam's girl and his brother obviously bore the director.

The whole film stands or falls on the portrait of Birnam himself, and here the writing is consistently good until the last-minute concession which gives him a new chance. Birnam's weakness—he dwells on small-time past successes—his cravings for oblivion and overdone literary speeches to the barman, are excellently conveyed, with Ray Milland's performance suggesting the charm, the softness, to perfection.

Two indifferent films followed in *The Emperor Waltz*, a feeble attempt to recapture the brio of *Champagne Waltz*, and *A Foreign Affair*, a repulsive onslaught on American and German post-war attitudes. Then, with *Sunset Boulevard*, the film which marked the end of the Wilder-Brackett partnership, and *Ace in the Hole*, Wilder returned as a major director. Both films are dominated by egomaniacs: Norma Desmond, the savage, self-obsessed Twenties' star, and Chuck Tatum, the vicious reporter down on his luck, longing as desperately as Norma for a comeback. Such small sympathy as Wilder can manage is reserved for these monsters; the others, the representatives of the world outside, are almost uniformly vile, and when someone decent is attempted (Nancy Olson's Hollywood intellectual, Jan Sterling's bitter waitress) the characterisation slips back into the conventional.

Sunset Boulevard's situations and characters are basically stock: the exaggerated, baroque figure of the star, the beat-up writer, the girl with ideas of a better Hollywood, the "charming" young Hollywood type (Jack Webb), even the sinister butler (Erich von Stroheim). Around the conventional people and situations there are the deliberately bizarre trimmings: a swimming pool overrun with rats, a monkey in a monkey-suit, the butler playing the organ in kid gloves, Norma Desmond's finger-clip cigarette-holder. All this could have been a kind of intellectual comic strip; indeed the characterisation rarely goes deeper, and the portrait of Hollywood is deliberately softened. The film succeeds entirely through the application of a

mannered, stylised technique so brilliantly manipulated that disbelief is totally suspended. Whereas *Double Indemnity* and the best passages in *The Lost Weekend* were austere, controlled, *Sunset Boulevard* is consciously a Big Show; and as such it is never less than dazzling.

The set-pieces are deservedly famous: the tailor's shop fitting, the visit to Paramount to see DeMille, the card-game of the "waxworks" (Anna Q. Nilsson, Buster Keaton, H. B. Warner and Swanson herself), the monkey funeral. The relationship between Desmond and the gigolo scriptwriter is drably and coldly delineated, and the motives for its continuance—her greed for him physically, his urgent need for cash—are daringly unglossed. Yet here is the film's most serious limitation: its iciness and impersonal harshness preclude the necessary suggestions of passion, of obsession, which would make Norma Desmond more than just a wonderful monster, but a tragic and desperate woman. The viewpoint throughout is that of a gifted reporter, brilliantly charting the surface grotesqueries of the situation, seizing on all the possible highlights, but missing the private miseries within. In order to frame Gloria Swanson's overwhelming performance as Norma Desmond, Wilder creates a wonderful vehicle for a star rather than a work of art.

Ace in the Hole purports to attack sensationalism—the brutal way in which Press and carnival promoters exploit the sudden burial of a shop-keeper in a New Mexico cave—while itself exploiting the situation no less heartlessly. Tatum (Kirk Douglas) has fallen from the Big Time because of a sudden blackballing. Winding up on an Albuquerque tabloid, he sees the chance of a return to the top in the interment story (the parallel with the Floyd Collins case of the Twenties is deliberately stressed). Tatum keeps the excitement whipped up for a week, while deliberately delaying the rescue so as to keep the story alive; the buried man dies, and his widow turns on Tatum and stabs him to death.

Another director might have made one feel the agony of the man in the cave, his increasing sense of hopelessness, and perhaps shown the way in which individuals risked their lives to get close to him with gifts of food and drink, a normal happening in real-life stories of this type. But the crowd in Wilder's eyes is a collective monster, of which Chuck Tatum,

(Continued on page 103)



Billy Wilder, Shirley MacLaine and Jack Lemmon at work on "Irma La Douce".

C L FILM P S



IN ITS WINTER NUMBER *Film* published the results of a poll in which readers voted for, among other things, "The Ten Best Bad Films which Gave Me the Most Pleasure." The results, as the editors remarked, were disappointing. When required to vote for "The Ten Top Bores among Reputable Movies" readers evidently knew where they were: everyone recognises a bore when he sees one. But the concept of the "good bad film" seemed to have them stumped, and most played safe by voting for films they enjoyed but did not feel quite qualified as "serious cinema". The list consequently kicked off with *Plein Soleil*, *Duck Soup*, *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* and *The Marx Brothers Go West*, and also high up were *Ben-Hur*, *Hellzapoppin*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Peeping Tom*. Now *Plein Soleil* seems to me a fair candidate for the good-bad category, though not one of my own favourites, but if *Duck Soup*, *Hellzapoppin* and *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break* are not by any realistic standard good good films there must be something drastically wrong somewhere. As for *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Peeping Tom*, they are not either in any real sense "bad"; their only misfortune is to belong to categories (science fiction and horror) which the squarer filmgoer still looks on rather askance.

Perhaps it does not really matter, but it would be a pity if the sterling qualities of the true good-bad films should go unrecognised or, worse, be so drastically misunderstood; they do present the dedicated picturegoer, after all, with some of his rarest and most treasured delights. *Ben-Hur*, as a matter of fact, provides a very useful stalking horse for defining the distinguishing features of a real good-bad film. *Ben-Hur*, I should say, is out of place in the good-bad film list because it is essentially a bad good film. A good good film knows what targets it is aiming at and hits them. A bad good film knows what targets it is aiming at too, but doesn't quite hit any of

them. Like *Ben-Hur* it will be quite well directed, quite well acted, quite well written, but not well *enough*; it will be tasteful, negative, dull. The good bad film, on the other hand, can never be negative. It may fail to hit the targets it aims at, but it will hit others fairly and squarely, even if the maker knows nothing about it. Usually the target it misses will be heavily dramatic; the target it hits will be comic. There are difficult borderline cases—I still can't decide whether Charles Walters knew what he was doing when he turned *Torch Song* and *Spinster* into comedies, but I like to think he did, and if so they automatically fall into another class altogether. But in the main the distinction is clear. Whatever the good-bad film does, however mistaken the path it takes, everything must be done with complete conviction, it must all have a sort of crazy logic and consistency and grandeur of its own. It must make big mistakes without batting an eyelid.

All this is leading round, of course, to my own list of pet good-baddies. I have been firm with myself and left out the films of Cottafavi, who knows exactly what he is doing and therefore makes good films *tout simplement*; likewise for Vidor in his best period (*Beyond the Forest* and *Ruby Gentry*). And I'm afraid I can't include any Crawford films, even my beloved *Female on the Beach*, which I have seen six times, always finding new riches, since whatever the directors think, Joan clearly knows precisely what she's up to. So what have we left? Well, I would give a very high place to *Girls of Spider Island*, that wildly hopeful and helplessly amateurish attempt to make a nude film in a horror framework (dubbed, unattributed and I think German); and to *King Dinosaur*, the cheapest sci-fi I have ever seen, made entirely on location in a national park with one cardboard segment of a space-ship (liable to wobble dangerously when touched), a cast of four and some lizards photographed large on a table top. The British cinema has been getting rather dull and self-conscious



"Joan clearly knows precisely what she's up to . . ." Jeff Chandler and Joan Crawford in "Female on the Beach".

of late, but there have been glories like *Idol of Paris* (Beryl Baxter and Christine Norden duelling with whips in the Bois de Boulogne), *Lilacs in the Spring* (the all-time Neagle omnibus film) and the early splendours of the Danzigers (recently back in production, I'm glad to say), from which *embarras de richesses* I would pick *A Woman Possessed*, if only for a classic performance from Margaretta Scott as a mother scorned and for some really vintage errors of continuity. My favourite Italian contribution to the genre was the Silvana Pampanini film to end all Silvana Pampanini films (it nearly did), *La Peccatrice dell' Isola*, while the French cinema does not lag far behind with the numerous works of Edmond T. Gréville, whose *L'Ile au Bout du Monde* stays particularly fresh in my memory. *Aan: Savage Princess* and *Joyhouse of Yokohama* show that the East is well able to match the West in this exacting field, and for my tenth I am torn between that prime example of Ross Hunterdom at its most splendidly vacuous, *All That Heaven Allows*, and that great example of luxurious Hollywood lunacy *Niagara*, though I think on balance *Niagara* has my vote.

* * *

OR AT LEAST NIAGARA WOULD HAVE been on my list were it not for *Films in Review*, but after reading Robert C. Roman's Monroe career-article in the October issue I am suitably rebuked. Mr. Roman puts forward the interesting view that M.M. was really a dramatic actress, and the trouble with her career was that some fool talked her into playing comedy. *Niagara* was the high point, but then came such artistic disasters as *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* ("not as suited to M.M.'s particular talents"), *The Seven Year Itch* (in which she was merely "the dumbest of dumb blondes") and *Bus Stop* ("M.M. was often downright ridiculous").

Odd, decidedly, but it is nice to see *F.I.R.* sticking to its guns like this. What I really enjoy most, though, is the review section. There, month by month, a group of redoubtable ladies with names like Flavia Wharton, Prudence Ashton, Louise Corbin, Lavinia Hutchins, Helen Weldon Kuhn and Tatiana Balkoff Drowne inveigh against the effeminacy of the American male, the fact that female film stars over 25 don't look 18 any more, the eagerness of film-makers to encourage perversion and communism, the readiness of other, less clear-sighted critics to help them, and the horror of practically everything not entirely home-grown. They particularly dislike Richard Beymer (whose "appearance on the screen is unmasculine") and Anthony Perkins—whom Ellen Fitzpatrick found "less offensive in *Tall Story*, largely because he shows a few faint signs of virility (not many, to be sure)." But then any actor who plays a neurotic of any sort on the screen needs about five beefy all-man roles to live it down in their eyes. Jennifer Jones aroused the ire of Miss Fitzpatrick in *Tender is the Night* ("Not only does she look much older than she seemed in *A Farewell to Arms*, but her face seems otherwise altered, and her beauty gone"), and Mr. Roman even found "the ebbing of youth" painfully apparent in Marilyn in *Bus Stop*, since she had reached the dread age of 30, that bourn from which no traveller returns.

F.I.R. reviewers are hot on degradation of all sorts; hate Buñuel, who provided in *The Young One* all the "bestialities which the sex perverts of the world expect in a film of his"; dislike Antonioni (the last scene of *La Notte* turned up simply as his "final pornographic bit"); and know exactly where problem films like *Victim* lead ("made in England, where sexual perversion is said now to infect 4 per cent. of the population"). They know all about politics too: "the 'Marienbad' of the title," surmised Miss Corbin, "is a piece of advertising for the Czechoslovakian spa of that name, inserted here to woo Left support." Now why didn't you or I think of that? And *The Manchurian Candidate* provoked them to such apoplexy that they were even driven to complaining that Frankenheimer's "direction of the so-called 'dream'



"Lolita": "the hysteria behind the stiff upper lip."

sequences is as clumsy as the editing thereof by Ferris Webster (these sequences make *no* sense)." What a pity the producers never thought to get in a continuity girl who would have helped them to avoid all those silly mistakes!

After all this, it should in fairness be said that the factual material in the *F.I.R.*'s scholarly articles and often equally scholarly letters is invaluable. But for good, clean, unintentional fun the reviews are hard to beat. Or is it just that, as Robert Aldrich said to me when I pointed out that audiences here thought it funny that there was not a whiff of sodomy in the whole of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, "Oh you British; you're so sophisticated!"

* * *

MENTION OF THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE REMINDS me of one or two other interesting points about that film. At least, for all its naïveté, the *F.I.R.* review did recognise that it was an anti-anti-communist film, an attack on McCarthyism rather than an hysterical piece of McCarthyish propaganda. Oddly, many of the British and most of the French critics simply saw it as anti-communist and were consequently superior about the quaint American superstitions to which, they supposed, it was giving yet another airing. This is more forgivable among the French critics, since unless they understood English very well it would be almost impossible to tell how funny the film was meant to be, or even if it was meant to be funny at all. This is, of course, a problem which constantly bedevils film criticism. When a Swede says that Bergman's films would be quite bearable if only he could write passable dialogue, or an Italian criticises Antonioni's talents as a writer, we are at a loss, so how are we to expect non-English-speaking critics to find their way through the intricacies of the English and American senses of humour?

To a certain extent, for instance, we can write off Jean Douchet's view of *Lolita* in *Cahiers* ("Tournant son film en Angleterre, Kubrick adopte le style cinématographique de ce pays: tiède, bouilli et sans la moindre épice") as simply a rather wild example of the magazine's general (and generally justified) cinematic Anglophobia. But again the thought comes, does he realise just how much of it is meant to be funny? Does the "Ve Americans" scene amuse him, or does the point of it simply disappear behind the language barrier? Does the

split-second timing of the bathroom scene after Shelley Winters' death mean anything at all to a critic who cannot follow the nuances of the dialogue? Does James Mason's marvellous illustration of the hysteria behind the stiff upper lip impress any but an English audience, which recognises instantly the type and the degree of deviation from it? (Might this, in fact, explain some of the mystification apparently felt even by American critics, who really couldn't believe that an outwardly correct Englishman would behave like this?) All very puzzling; it might well be worth a little of somebody's time and trouble to enquire a bit more deeply into the reasons why opinions on films like *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Lolita* differ so radically from country to country. Sociological thesis, anyone?

* * *

IF SUCH A WORK WERE COMPILED, and if it were heavy enough, a tabloid version of it would probably find a ready welcome in the columns of one of our steadier all-round intellectual magazines. Or again, it might not; there really seems to be no predicting what will appeal to the editors when they feel the urge which occasionally comes on even the sternest of them to acknowledge that the cinema exists. Usually the result is disastrous: witness *Encounter's* recent flirtation with the subject, in the shape of Nicola Chiaromonte's essay "Priests of the Highbrow Cinema: On Image and Word" (January).

This was one of those really pretentious pieces, full of arguable, unargued generalisations on the arts and only a rather shaky knowledge of the cinema (the author thinks, apparently, that Robbe-Grillet was director as well as writer on *L'Année Dernière* and that the heyday of silent film *d'art* was in the 1910s), which appeal to non-expert editors as bringing real intellect to bear on the otherwise naïve, benighted art. In two short paragraphs Signor Chiaromonte establishes—to his own satisfaction at least—that "A word can be a symbol. A photograph, however, can only be a sign," and goes on from there. What about painting or sculpture,

then; are they also unable to attain to symbolism? The question is not answered; it is not even raised, we are so busy painfully pursuing the old fallacy about the impropriety of anything but a "documentary" attitude to the film, with Pudovkin and his three faces of whoever-it-was thrown in for good measure. Signor Chiaromonte's own critical insights seldom rise above this sort of level:

All we have to do is to see a film twenty years old to realise how ephemeral the cinematic idiom is. The movies, which at first glance seem to speak the most realistic and unequivocal language, quickly become stiff, mannered and unreal. Not only will the action of an old movie seem absurdly slow or preposterously fast, the plot itself will be far from clear. The smile that so often comes to our lips when we view such a film . . .

Just the average cineaste's reaction to *Citizen Kane* or *Alexander Nevsky* or *I Bambini di Guardano* or *Les Enfants du Paradis*, no doubt. Or is it?

After this it is a relief to turn to the admirably sensible and unpretentious remarks on the cinema by Professor Stuart Hampshire reported in, of all places, the Jesuit magazine *The Month*. Professor Hampshire is an addict, capable of gobbling up anything his local has to offer, from *L'Avventura* through *The Hustler* to the second features and trailers ("I am amazed by my capacity to sit through almost anything which does not embarrass"). He appreciates the continuity between the commercial cinema and the cinema of art, and is disturbed by the apparent failure of most critics now writing to recognise it. He is put off by the "false rhetoric" of Bergman, but acutely singles out the excellence of Robert Ryan in *Crossfire* and *Clash by Night*. These few scattered notes of a philosopher are what one would hope might result from the contact of a major intellect with the cinema. But unfortunately it is the pretensions of pieces like "Priests of the Highbrow Cinema" that editors fall for nine times out of ten. No wonder outsiders can seldom be persuaded to take writing on the cinema seriously!

ARKADIN

FILM REVIEWS

THE ECLIPSE

THE ECLIPSE (GALA) BEGINS, as *L'Avventura* and *La Notte* ended, at dawn. Outside the window a water-tower looms like some futuristic mushroom; inside, a man sits rigid in a chair, inertia containing anger, while a girl restlessly circles the room. The affair is over; they have talked themselves to a standstill; and this time neither can pick up the shattered pieces. It is, unmistakably and in every detail, an Antonioni sequence. Yet it is also, one uneasily feels, precisely the kind of sequence that a clever parodist, asked for pastiche Antonioni, might produce. Monica Vitti takes up exquisite attitudes, while the breeze from an electric fan ruffles her hair; in the foreground of a later shot the fan itself turns slowly, an indefinitely menacing object sustaining its own momentum in a room drained of human vitality; as the couple confront each other, the camera sees him over the top of her head, then a cut to the reverse angle. Intellectually, one is aware of what Antonioni is doing and why he has chosen to do it in this dehumanising way. But at the same time, in its deliberate echoing of the more sombre moods of *La Notte*, the scene pushes style towards the thin edge of mannerism.

Then Monica Vitti walks out into the morning, and the film expands. Far from being a return journey over ground already

covered, it takes Antonioni out into new areas, covers a wider range than perhaps any of his films since *Le Amiche* has attempted. The continuity is one of feeling, never of plot, and the second affair, which contains whatever of plot the film has to offer, only begins when the nature of the heroine has been fully exposed. Vittoria (Monica Vitti) goes to the Rome stock exchange in search of her mother (Lilla Brignone), a widow who plays the market as compulsively as if her life depended on it. Vittoria's first meeting with Piero (Alain Delon), her mother's young broker, is entirely casual. There follow two long sequences—both of which, interestingly, take different directions in the film from those adumbrated in the published script—in which we see Vittoria in pursuit of happiness. The visit to the friend from Kenya did not originally include Vittoria's jungle mimicry, nor did it end with the weird and wonderful moment when she hears the thin music of the wind in the high railings outside the Olympic stadium. The flying sequence was more conventionally plotted (a threatened storm, etc.) and the script only sketches the Verona airport sequel, which for a moment floods the screen with contentment as it does with air and light.

These changes between script and screen show Antonioni refining down his conception, giving the film over during its making to a mood which is also an expression of his heroine. What Vittoria is looking for she hardly knows—and her refrain of "I don't know" becomes an accompaniment to both affairs. Her intellectual fiancé, Riccardo, has worn her out; her relationship with Piero, played with jumping-jack agility and a paper-thin charm by Alain Delon, will founder on incompatibility. Piero is a new character for Antonioni, in that about him hang the clouds neither of failure nor of intellectual effort. He knows his way around, and if he cannot convert Vittoria to his cruder certainties neither can she bring doubt into his life. Piero will go his way unscathed, as the stock market will recover from the crash.

It is precisely the opening of this door into Piero's world, however, which gives *The Eclipse* its extra dimension. The two long stock exchange sequences are not merely brilliantly manoeuvred set-pieces, but confrontations for Vittoria. The Antonioni heroine runs the risk of seeming too self-absorbed, too solitary, too devi-

talised by her own sensitivity. Here, on the floor of the stock exchange, she encounters a world with other ideas of happiness than the song of the wind in the railings; and it is from her reaching out towards that harder world—towards what it has to offer of confidence, know-how, assertive vitality—that the film acquires its range of references.

Four domestic interiors go some way towards expressing that range: Vittoria's flat, with its theatre posters and cool decorations; Riccardo's house, all books, magazines, abstract paintings, self-conscious *objets d'art*; her mother's apartment, with the family photographs carrying their intimations of poverty and Vittoria's depressing little schoolgirl bedroom; and the home of Piero's parents, splendidly sombre and oppressive, again dominated by family relics and by pictures on which the only comment is "We've always had it." Here, more even than in *L'Avventura* or *La Notte*, Antonioni uses the books on people's tables, the paintings and photographs on their walls, not merely as short-cuts to describe character but as extensions of personality. This incessant concern with objects, with the furniture of living, the cathedral pillars of the stock exchange, the window flung open upon a water-tower or a church, is integral to his whole way of looking at life. People are not only what they are, but what they live with. Vittoria has escaped from her mother's home to her own flat in a suburb so aggressively modern that it looks like some ground plan for next year's Ideal Home Exhibition, and her new environment has become part of her.

People are so obsessed by the idea of gloom hanging like a thundercloud over Antonioni's films that they can contrive to make all his settings sound depressing. (One critic even described the building on the street corner as 'derelict', whereas it is quite clearly, and in the context inevitably, under construction.) For the director himself this is obviously a world in the process of being built; and there is no indication that he is less than fascinated by it, that he would contemplate with pleasure an existence stripped of plate-glass and concrete. The pull is never back from the "soulless" present towards a kindlier past, and Antonioni is the least nostalgic of filmmakers. Yet the fears that overshadow this world—in the newspaper headlines, in the Kenyan girl's forecast of African uprisings, in the mother's propitiatory offering of salt to the gods of the market—combine the elements of primitive threat and nuclear terror. The final sequence of *The Eclipse*, that much-discussed abstract succession of shots after the film's characters have left the screen, sums up these intimations of mortality.

A love scene between Piero and Vittoria, a moment of gaiety spontaneous in intention and a shade forced in execution, has ended. Piero puts back the telephone receivers in his office, sits at his desk, lets the telephone which is the background noise of his life ring away unanswered. Vittoria dawdles down the stairs, stops for a moment outside a grilled window, and gives the last of those smiles which in Monica Vitti, as in Garbo, suggest an infinite concern for an uncaring world. Then we are back at the street corner of their meeting-place, with the zebra crossing, the water-butt into which she has dropped a sliver of wood and he a book of matches, the bus stop and the building site. In a series of shots—58 in the published script, 44 in the version shown here—we see the approach of evening. A nurse wheels a pram; a man drives past behind a fast trotter; buses let out their passengers. The tempo quickens during the sequence, from long-held shots of the street to a flash of the balconies of a block of flats, jutting out like white jawbones. The wind blows in the trees; the lights are switched on. The film ends on a close-up of the halo of light surrounding a street lamp—a shot in its context charged with desolation.

In its context: in this film, everything is a matter of context. It is the force of association which makes these images of a suburban street corner, on a summer evening, come as an echo from the end of the world; as it is the juxtaposition of the mechanics of the stock exchange with an alertness to the tiny details of personality which gives these scenes their density. A man who has suffered a crushing loss on the market sits at a café table in the sunshine gravely doodling flowers on a scrap of paper. Vittoria's mother, who has just made a neat profit, haggles over the price of a kilo of pears. A cheerful drunk, sauntering down a night street, is next seen as a dead hand behind the shattered windscreen of a waterlogged car. "There are days when a chair, a table, a book, a man seem much the same..." Beneath the cool, clean physical landscape of the Roman suburb lies the disordered landscape of the emotions. Antonioni's style has always been founded on a juxtaposition of people and places. In *The Eclipse*, however, juxtaposition has become fusion: the two landscapes are made one, the visual imagery and the mental imagery effortlessly interlock.

PENELOPE HOUSTON



"The Eclipse": Monica Vitti watches the speculator who has just lost a fortune in the market crash.

BOCCACCIO 70

STUMPED FOR A PUBLICITY LINE, perhaps, Joe Levine hit on the idea of selling *Boccaccio 70* (Fox) as "the first film in three acts." This, apart from eliciting the inevitable reply "so what?", is at best one of those depends-what-you-mean records, and what it means in this case is that it is a triple bill, which, as every theatregoer knows, hardly ever adds up to the equivalent of a good, straightforward, one-piece evening's entertainment.

Not that its credentials are not impressive. Three sizeable chunks of film, three major directors, three female stars of some slight note (there was a fourth piece, by a lesser director and without stars, but that fell by the wayside shortly before Cannes last year). If we would rush to see new films by Fellini, Visconti and De Sica, should we not rush with even more enthusiasm to get the three for the price of one? Perhaps we might, but if we do we shall be disappointed. The three stories have only the vague and hopeful connection with Boccaccio that they are all faintly saucy, one being comic, one fantastic would-be satirical, and one sentimental. None of the directors is anywhere near his best and De Sica, as a matter of fact, is (one hopes) absolutely at his worst. The Fellini is a little better, if only by virtue of being peculiar, and Visconti comes off best—at any rate his episode bears witness to all-round competence, if not on this occasion much more.

De Sica's episode, *The Raffle*, is an attempt to do Sophia Loren's pizza-seller bit from *L'Oro di Napoli* over again in colour and wide screen. This time she works in a travelling fun-fair and her gimmick is to raffle her favours among the local menfolk at each stopping-place, the business end of the proceedings being left in the hands of a timid little man who needs his cut for his pregnant wife. Inevitably fate, in the shape of a beefy young farmer, steps in to take her heart out of her work; and the plot of the film, such as it is, turns on her attempts to extract herself from her undertaking. But La Loren has never been much of a comedienne, and is by now too haloed in Hollywood stardom to be very convincing as a cunning little peasant vixen. Nor is De Sica much of a comedy director; he can manage the light fantastic of *Miracle in Milan*, but the spirit of broad rustic farce eludes him, and a lot of frantic rushing round and face-making on the screen proves no substitute for real lightness of touch on the camera.

The Fellini episode, *The Temptation of Dr. Antonio*, is at least very strange, and there seems to be something there, struggling to get out, which just does not finally manage to emerge. It is a slight anecdote about a puritanical censor of public morals who is tormented, like St. Anthony, with visions of an extravagantly voluptuous life of the senses which his conscious mind has rejected. The centrepiece is a long dream sequence in which the gargantuan figure of Anita Ekberg

from the vast hoarding outside his house (where she is encouraging the public, appropriately, to drink milk) descends and frolics with him through the night streets of Rome. There is little to it, and one's first thought is that the episode is much too long for its material. Second thoughts suggest, however, that it may in fact be too short. We know that Fellini first edited his episode to run an hour and a half, and wanted it released as a separate feature. What remains suggests that the story was paced with this form in mind, and the removal of more than a third to fit it into the "three-act" framework has left merely a series of slow, bleeding chunks. The original version may have been for all I know an aesthetic disaster, but on the other hand it might have caught consistently the tone of broad, coarse caricature which is now established only intermittently (in the splendid scene in a way-out, all-white, ultra-modernistic church, for instance), and made clearer the function of one or two rather mysterious figures, like Dr. Antonio's sister who has vision-fits and the demonic little girl who regulates the game.

The Visconti section, *The Job*, seems to have been generally accounted the best episode; and so admittedly it is, in that it does not attempt much, but what it does attempt it carries off with great skill. It is a bitter-sweet tragi-comedy about the lovely young wife of a profligate count who has married her at least partly for her father's money and now is involved in a call-girl scandal, through which it emerges exactly how much he is willing to spend on a night's entertainment. His wife does not take this as expected; she considers leaving him, but after thinking it over decides to remain and charge him a commensurate amount for a night in her company. It is, after all, the only job she knows. . . . Visconti's handling of all this is very smooth and elegant, if a trifle on the slow side, and he gets good performances out of Romy Schneider and Tomas Milian. But the episode is essentially high-level schmaltz, and it is difficult to make out whether Visconti realises this as clearly as he should. Is he not perhaps—the doubt obtrudes itself—taking everything just a little too seriously?

JOHN RUSSELL TAYLOR

SPARROWS CAN'T SING

PERHAPS ONE SIMPLY HOPED too much of Joan Littlewood's directorial début in *Sparrows Can't Sing* (Warner-Pathé). Certainly there is charm, gaiety and good humour in abundance, and by comparison with most British films an enviable technical freedom, in this breezy tale of a merchant seaman who returns to his native Stepney after two years to find that his pretty wife is living

with another man, and who falls in (or out) with a host of local inhabitants before finally persuading her to come back to him for a while, doubtful two-year-old daughter and all. But there is something lacking.

One of Joan Littlewood's particular strengths as a stage director is her ability to find a style—an overall rhythm—which exactly evokes the mood of a play. *A Taste of Honey*, for example, she built up more or less in the form of a blues, catching the joy and longing of Jo's experience much more accurately than Tony Richardson's film. In *Sparrows Can't Sing* (stage version), she used exactly the same jolly mixture of song and dance and breakneck speed to achieve the very different overall effect of a gently stylised, often luminously beautiful commedia dell'arteish miniature where—as with all miniature painting—the execution was more important than the likeness. *Sparrows Can't Sing* never was a realistic portrayal of Stepney and its inhabitants, any more than the characters presented by the great artistes of the Edwardian music-hall were realistic Cockneys. At times, though, the film version (promoted in the linguistic scale to become *Sparrows*), threatens to crack wide open in a confusion of styles inviting comparisons—which should be irrelevant—with reality.

The trouble is partly that the Stepney locations are real, and therefore throw into relief the fact that none of the characters really lives there, that none of them does any real work, and all of them seem to have too much time to spare to devote to Charlie and his domestic problems; and partly that there is a plethora of acting styles, ranging from the grimacing ham of James Booth (as Charlie) and Roy Kinnear, via the stylish and stylised comedy playing of Avis Bunnage, Barbara Windsor, Barbara Ferris and Griffith Davies, down to the splendid May Scagnelli (playing Charlie's mother), in real life a café proprietor in Stratford East, and here not acting in her first role but simply *being*. The stage version had just as many clashing acting styles, but the production had a firm unity which took them all under its sheltering wing and turned them into a family.

Sparrows Can't Sing misses this unity because it has no overall rhythm. That is, it all bounces along at a fair old pace, but the sum of its parts adds up to no more than the sum of its parts. At any point one could insert or subtract scenes without making any essential difference to its shape or meaning (just try doing this to, say, *Lola* or *A Bout de Souffle*, and see how they fall apart in meaningless fragments). All is well for the first half of the film, which is mainly impressionistic—Charlie's arrival in Stepney, his discovery that his home has been demolished and his wife flown; the fluttering in female doves as he picks up the threads of acquaintance and begins to gather information as to what had happened in his absence. Breathlessly and fluidly, the camera follows the characters around the streets, into their homes, and out for briefly joyous excursions into greenery and open air, making a sort of formal ballet out of the general to-and-fro round Charlie's presence. Witty, exact and absorbing, there is much to enjoy here: Barbara Windsor (as Charlie's wife), trotting briskly with plump determination behind her pram; Griffith Davies observing with grave puzzlement how his girl-friend seems to prefer a gangling, over-dressed rival; May Scagnelli, at one moment weeping quietly over her son's return, at another cooing with irrelevant delight over his purchase of a giant double bed. But about halfway through the plot suddenly begins to obtrude itself, demanding to be taken seriously, as the film concentrates on establishing the genuine feeling between Charlie and his wife; another set of references is called into play, and the whole affair takes on a hollow ring, sentimental, superficial and utterly unreal. Once reality intrudes, the whole charming comic fantasy collapses like a pack of cards, just as one image of a soldier with his brains oozing out would prick the delicious bubble of Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms*.

Sparrows Can't Sing, in fact, is at its best when at its most formal and unforced—for example in the sequence when Charlie goes to a vague address in Cable Street in search of his wife, and moves through its four floors in a wondering voyage of discovery: on the first floor, a couple of Indians squatting motionless in the middle of a furniture-less waste; on the second, a group of Africans who sympathetically offer a substitute Maggie, and cheer him up with a joyfully impromptu mating-dance; on the third, a small boy solemnly confessing to a welfare-worker that he was guilty of breaking into an off-licence and later being found drunk on the premises; on the fourth, some wild mittel-European festivity. Comparisons are always unfair, but if *Sparrows Can't Sing* had been



Roy Kinnear in "Sparrows Can't Sing".

content, like *Il Posto*, simply to observe (in its own way) and to take things as they came, it would have been a lot more successful. But at least it does suggest, in the middle of the so-called commercial new realism, that life, and people, are potentially pleasant, and not just a tiresome drag.

TOM MILNE

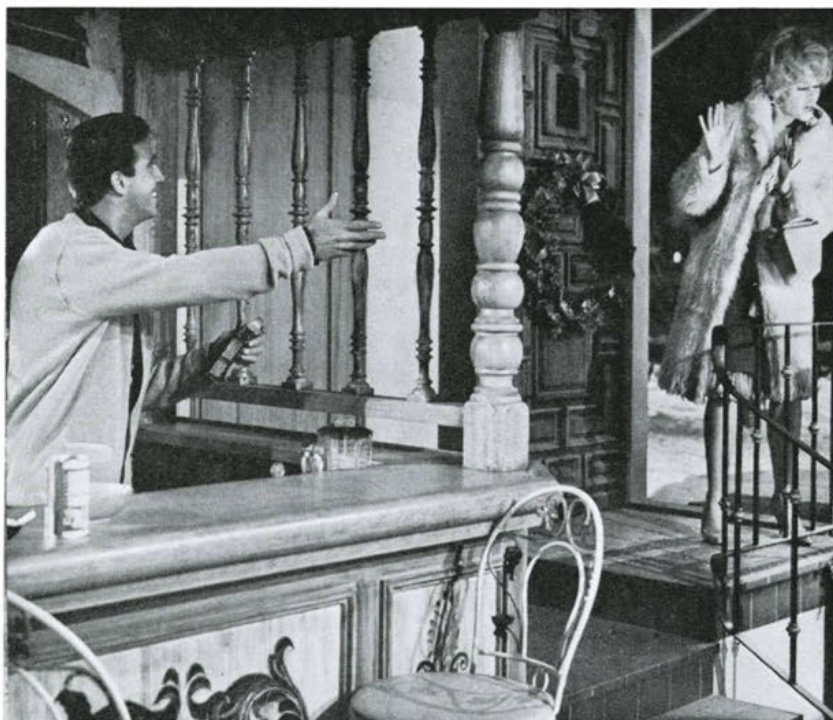
PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT and TWO FOR THE SEESAW

THE PROBLEMS OF VIRILITY which crop up so regularly in American literature tend to be given portentously solemn treatment. What a pleasure, therefore, to find the whole myth of "manliness" being mocked by Tennessee Williams, in a sharp but frothy comedy which combines his usual alarming perceptiveness with an unsuspected sense of fun. *Period of Adjustment* (M-G-M) has been adapted by Isobel Lennart and directed by George Roy Hill, a newcomer from American television. Together they have composed a lead-in sequence which fulfils the playwright's intentions and neatly matches his wit. George Haverstick, a Korean war veteran, is a victim of the virility myth: terrified of failing to reach the required standards, he suffers from a nervous tremor at moments of crisis. He marries his fluff young nurse and they set out for the honeymoon in torrential rain and an enormous Cadillac hearse which George, with characteristic self-deception, insists is a station wagon. They eat their first meal together in a roadside café under the amiably bawdy gaze of a row of truck drivers and spend the unconsummated wedding night in a sordid motel. (Here the director's judgment slips slightly when he drenches Isabel under a leaking gutter—a moment of Keystone comedy quite out of harmony with the mood of the rest.) Their arrival, bickering furiously, at the home of George's war buddy Ralph Baitz, with Isabel wailing for a lost zip-bag and George disappearing into the night, brings the plot to the point at which the play began.

From here on, the action stays mainly within Ralph's "Spanish-style" suburban bungalow, very nicely realised with its olde oake bar and wardrobe labelled "His" and "Hers". This may seem a little unenterprising, but an adaptor is entitled to feel that the play is the thing and the restricted setting does enable the director to concentrate sharply on his players. Isabel is a typical Southern belle in embryo—demanding, selfish and vain. But Jane Fonda, tittupping around like a baby giraffe with a pout, pours such a torrent of humour and feeling into her that she becomes instantly likeable. Perhaps she pushes rather hard at times, and her Southern drawl is broad beyond belief, but there is evidence of abundant talent yet to come. Jim Hutton, still more gangling than his partner, gives George a coltish charm even at his most blustering. And both are helped by the director's instinct for small but telling pieces of business, such as Isabel's ecstatic gushing over a fat and unprepossessing spaniel or George's absurd posturing before the gaping truck drivers. The touch becomes less sure in one or two excursions outside the bungalow, where the artificiality of the studio sets seems to have infected the direction.

The film's sub-plot, in which the foundering marriage of Ralph and Dorothea Baitz emerges from its own period of adjustment, loses some of its point through the casting of Tony Franciosa, a too sleek and flashy Ralph. But Dorothea, a plain girl who knows she has been married for her father's money, is played by Lois Nettleton with enough feeling to let us realise that theirs is really the more interesting of the two problems. Ralph's relations with his father-in-law, his wife's subservience to her parents, Ralph's fear that his son is becoming a sissy (virility again rearing its head) are all potentially tragic situations and do not lose their sting through being placed in a comic frame. None of the issues is finally resolved and the Baitz home remains suspended over its symbolic precipice (the house is literally subsiding a few inches each year), but Ralph is finally able to convince Dorothea of the reality of his love. His method, the gift of a fur coat, could be a supremely cynical touch. Fortunately, Miss Nettleton's glowing sincerity makes the idea unthinkable.

If Isobel Lennart seems to have been less successful with William Gibson's *Two for the Seesaw* (United Artists), it is possibly because the original material is less flexible. While Williams writes plays about people Gibson tends to write parts for players, with almost too keen an eye for theatrical effect. His Gittel Mosca is a variation on an old type. If she does not, as an over-enthusiastic hand-out asserts, "combine the fire of Scarlett O'Hara with the poignancy of Blanche DuBois," she certainly has points in common with many



"Period of Adjustment": Tony Franciosa and Jane Fonda.

a warm-hearted theatrical scatterbrain. This time she is a cheerful Bronx Jewess living in Greenwich Village with an ulcer, but these are merely the frills on the basic pattern. The important thing about Gittel is that she provides a part big enough for an actress to turn round in; and although Shirley MacLaine fills in with the appropriate accent and gestures, it is her own amusing and generous personality that carries the action along.

Gittel values her independence and, although not over-fussy about whom she sleeps with, she likes to make her own terms. She meets Jerry Ryan, a lawyer from Omaha, when he is wallowing in self-pity after leaving his rich wife because he no longer cares to accept her father's patronage. (It offends that old bogey, his manliness.) Tired of being dependent, he determines to make Gittel dependent on him. When he has achieved his aim and broken down her defences, he walks out and goes back to his ever-loving wife. No actor could hope to make this middle-aged baby acceptable, but Robert Mitchum turns in an honest try. Gittel's final plight would be more touching if she had shown a harder shell in the early stages; Miss MacLaine is just a bit too soft and a bit too clean—Gittel, one feels, should be very slightly squalid. Nevertheless it is her film, and her only real rival is the telephone, which virtually plays a leading role. Thanks to the width of the Panavision screen it actually plays two parts at once—one in each half. This not very inventive device is symptomatic of Robert Wise's rather heavy direction, which is at its most laboured in a badly caricatured beatnik party sequence opening the film. And André Previn must take credit for some of the loudest and most insistent background music since the palmy days of the Forties.

BRENDA DAVIES

TIME STOOD STILL

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM SEASON presented by BBC Television during the first quarter of the year ended on a flourish with the English premiere of Ermanno Olmi's *Time Stood Still*. Made in 1959, after his series of industrial shorts, the film reveals the clear beginnings of a style and method carried to greater maturity in the later and better known *Il Posto*. Apart from being the only picture new to English audiences in the BBC series, the television presentation was something of a makeshift experiment, in that the sides of the Totalscope screen disappeared and the original Italian dialogue was faded down under an English translation. Better like this, however, than not at all.

In a way, Olmi adopts Zavattini's famous neo-realist slogan—



Backstage at the Palladium: Jack Klugman and Judy Garland in "I Could Go On Singing".

"the important thing is to make an audience see"—as his starting point. But, unlike some of his predecessors, he never feels any need to make a grand gesture. His is the gentlest, quietest form of observation, effortlessly detailed, always alert to the interaction between character and background. And the backgrounds, in this case, are magnificent. A vast expanse of snowy Alps and a half-completed dam form the setting, in which a withdrawn middle-aged man spends the winter months as watchman while work on the dam is suspended. Olmi sketches his day-to-day life in a series of scenes apparently spontaneous but doubtless carefully plotted. His routine is simple: periodic inspections of the site; cooking and washing-up; laying traps for intrusive hares; protecting his hut against the stinging mountain wind. Suddenly, a stranger interrupts his disciplined peace. Promised a replacement for a companion who has gone on leave, he is presented with a student who is, in fact, a kind of extrovert embryo of the young clerk in *Il Posto*.

At first, the boy is a source of constant irritation. Whether messing about on skis or exultantly tracing his impression in a hillock of snow, his ingenuousness simply obtrudes on the older man's firm pattern of life. Sitting quietly in the cabin after their meal, they play draughts (the boy wins) and mutter small talk between listening to the radio and working out their sleeping arrangements. Olmi is scrupulously fair and unobtrusively amused in watching this muted duel: neither can give what the other wants and by nature they are both a little sly (as in the scene where they surreptitiously snatch glances at each others' books when the coast is clear). Then, slowly and almost by accident, understanding creeps in. A storm shakes the hut, man and boy huddle in their blankets in front of the stove, and, in the film's most perceptive scene, the watchman discovers that he can, after all, talk to his companion about his early life and his misgivings about the world. The boy, though sceptical, doesn't argue: they have achieved a relationship.

The final sequence shows how this friendship is tested, when the boy complains of a fever and the old man pulls him through with hot drinks and comforting words as they shelter in a disused church near the dam. Although Olmi makes the most of this setting photographically and emotionally, for me these last scenes are marred by a whiff of Catholic sentimentalism, a hint of that self-consciousness so carefully avoided everywhere else.

Olmi gives the academic conception of "documentary" a complete face lift, showing that the tranquil contemplation of people carrying out very simple tasks can be turned into something engrossing. And he manages something much more difficult, in that his characters grow as human beings under this glancing, unstressed

observation. He is not the kind of director to whom one easily attributes messages, yet both his films seem preoccupied with the theme of release from the pressures of an unfriendly world. Unlike the clerk in *Il Posto*, the young student in *Time Stood Still* does succeed in achieving his own freedom among the mountains.

Needless to say, the film deserves to be seen on the screen it was made for; and it should cost little to subtitle. British distributors, please note.

JOHN GILLET

In Brief

FOR THE FIRST FEW minutes of *THE WRONG ARM OF THE LAW* (BLC/*British Lion*), with Peter Sellers doing his "Monsieur Jules" routine—Cockney gang-leader masquerading as a French couturier—it seems that one may be in for yet another of those dispiriting British comedies where a star comedian is encouraged to overplay his welcome, or a tolerably funny script is uneasily allowed to take care of its own momentum. Wonders, though, will never cease, and *The Wrong Arm of the Law* quickly reveals the unmistakable hand of a director. This is Cliff Owen's third film (his second, *A Prize of Arms*, received quite a lot of praise), and he is obviously a name to reckon with. Admittedly, he has an excellent script, with a fine line in characteristically eccentric additional dialogue by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson (Hancock's ex-writers) and John Antrobus (*Goon Show*), which plays happily with the idea of Soho gangs as an organised social unit, complete with luncheon vouchers, holidays with pay and a welfare service. "Who fixed for your son to go to Gordonstoun?" Sellers reproachfully asks a recalcitrant member of his gang; and, after the gang has enthusiastically applauded a screening of a home-movie revealing the combination of a jeweller's safe, "Next week we have some educational films, starting with *Rififi*," he proudly announces. Essentially, the script (by John Warren and Len Heath) is a comic variant on the police-underworld alliance against the child-murderer in *M. Three Australians*, working on the principle that it's about time some criminals were shipped back to the Old Country, come to London, get inside information on underworld plans so that they are on the spot disguised as policemen, arrest the thieves and make off with the loot. Distressed by the resulting upset to their economic system, the gangs join hands with an equally indignant police force to trap the unsporting Australian trio. Miraculously, the invention never flags as absurdity piles on delicious absurdity, and the film fairly bristles with genuine comic creations: Lionel Jeffries' obliging and hopefully zealous police inspector in charge of investigations; Bernard Cribbins' worried gang-leader, riddled with nervous tics and safety-belts in his Rolls; John Le Mesurier's patiently melancholic Assistant Commissioner; Tuttle Lemkow's curiously neanderthal visiting German cracksman. Peter Sellers, too, is fine, matching the restraint which Kubrick imposed on him in *Lolita* (though imagination toys happily with the idea of Hancock's ingratiating panache in a part that seems tailor-made for him). But it is Cliff Owen who keeps the film literally bouncing along, perfectly timing his effects so that even jokes one is waiting for (the repetition of the phony policeman gag, for example) are rendered unexpectedly funny. Even at the very end, just as one is settling down to a routine finish, Owen brings off a beautiful twist with one of the best lines in the film, when . . . but it would be unfair to spoil your fun.—TOM MILNE

I COULD GO ON SINGING (United Artists). Movie stars have been rather out of fashion ever since Hollywood discovered the Actors' Studio, and an audition by Lee Strasberg became a smarter testimonial than the hunting cries of the fans on the neon-lit pavements. It's good to be reminded, though, that there are still occasions when the star can do it all on his (or more often her) own; can take the picture by the scruff of its neck in the first sequence, and hang superbly on to the end. *I Could Go On Singing* is of this order. The plot (script by Mayo Simon) comes out of that drawer of serviceable show business remnants labelled "can a star also be a good wife and mother." The co-star (Dirk Bogarde) is generously self-effacing; the minor players (Aline MacMahon, Jack Klugman and a likeably direct child actor, Gregory Phillips) know their places and keep to them. Direction, by Ronald Neame, is so flat as to be almost ironed out. The total purpose, object and achievement of the film is contained in Judy Garland's performance; and even performance, here, is a word to be used diffidently, since the essence of her quality—as actress, if not as singer—has always been her ability to seem not to be performing. What other actress, playing a big emotional scene, would keep dabbing so ineffectively at a tear-stained face with the

back of a distracted hand? What other actress would get quite such an edge of nervous tension into the moment when she first walks on to the Palladium stage, keyed up to confront not just an imaginary audience in a film, but any audience, any time? Playing, as in *A Star is Born*, a part which draws obviously on her own experience, Judy Garland gives one a sense of the strain of life as Judy Garland. It can't be too easy to direct her; and the film's method, with some of the songs and duologues shot in long and almost uninterrupted takes, suggests a wariness of breaking a mood, snapping that taut line of emotional concentration. As a film, *I Could Go On Singing* is threadbare, as well as being pinned down to those mid-Atlantic attitudes which make so much play with a helicopter tour of London (ending, on a wild stroke of extravagance, in the churchyard at Stoke Poges), or a camera reverently tracking over the frontage of the Savoy. But Judy Garland imposes her own kind of urgent truth, in the spontaneity and the raw nerves and the fortissimo slamming home of the songs. There is no counterfeiting this sort of talent.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

PHAEDRA (United Artists). S.S. *Phaedra* has sunk off the coast of Norway. Its Greek owner reads the names of the dead to an ante-roomful of wailing, black-garbed women. His son's shattered body is borne into the house. Upstairs, fussed over by her mannish maid, the infamously lustful *Phaedra* (she, updated, of the antique myth), having donned her black eye-mask and swallowed the fatal dose, now embraces endless sleep. One almost expects a last soaring crane-shot and a Wellesian voice intoning "This is a Melinafilm."

Phaedra is just that: a decorative shrine for a performance by Melina Mercouri which stands closest comparison with Garbo in *The Kiss* and *Camille* and Isa Miranda in Tony Richardson's stage production of *Orpheus Descending*. The script, by the director Jules Dassin and Margarita Liberaki, is unadulterated hyperbole, the richness of its absurdity vitiated only by Anthony Perkins's wan and callow Hippolytus-Alexis. Otherwise, the framework subserves and stands up to its star: grand windswept seascapes, a London restaurant lit by a shimmering cascade of candles, a priceless ring sacrificed to the Thames, broodingly jealous dusk-to-dawn vigils on overhanging parapets, and a seduction on the floor chronicled with Sternbergian thoroughness—well, yes, through a gauze, though I was going to say in terms of melting images of flame and rain.

Fluidly shot, then, by Jacques Natteau, consistently enjoyable, *Phaedra* isn't perhaps quite the serious art film one imagines Dassin imagines it to be. That, no doubt, would be a film about rich and corrupt Greek society, about the tragic obsession and the heroic gesture and father-love and all the other things *Phaedra* flirts with so blandly. Yet there is art of sorts, not only in the ritual beauty of the star's trappings—the obligatory white silk turban and vengeful dark glasses—but in the interior performance as well. This actress of temperament and husky sensual tension creates a vividly authentic tragedy queen, twice as large as life, alternately exhausting and exhausted ("Not tonight, Thanos. It is a beautiful jewel and I want

to rest"), fey and demanding. The secret, largely, is one of control and artistic level. The role is self-indulgent, impossibly glamorous. Miss Mercouri makes it possible by playing down and—like Miranda or Davis or Magnani—playing ugly. She is that increasingly rare phenomenon, a throwback to the Thirties in fact: a genuine actress who not only needs but is enhanced by all that is baroque in the established paraphernalia of stardom.—PETER JOHN DYER

LA POUPEE (Sebricon). "Very Audiberti," said the well-read young man; but if you've never read any Audiberti, it doesn't help you very much to understand what he's on about in his screenplay for Jacques Baratier's *La Poupée* (or *He, She or It?*, as the English title has it). There is a dictator, a political assassin, a revolutionary party, an industrialist with a foot in every camp, a comic professor and the industrialist's wife whose *alter ego* has been released and embodied by the professor. There are glimpses of a sort of narrative about the planned assassination of the dictator. He is murdered before the appointed day; and since the revolution will fail without a properly staged assassination, the assassin himself takes the dictator's place. Instead of calmly accepting his murder, as planned, however, he assumes the murdered man's former power; for dictators grow like dragon's teeth.

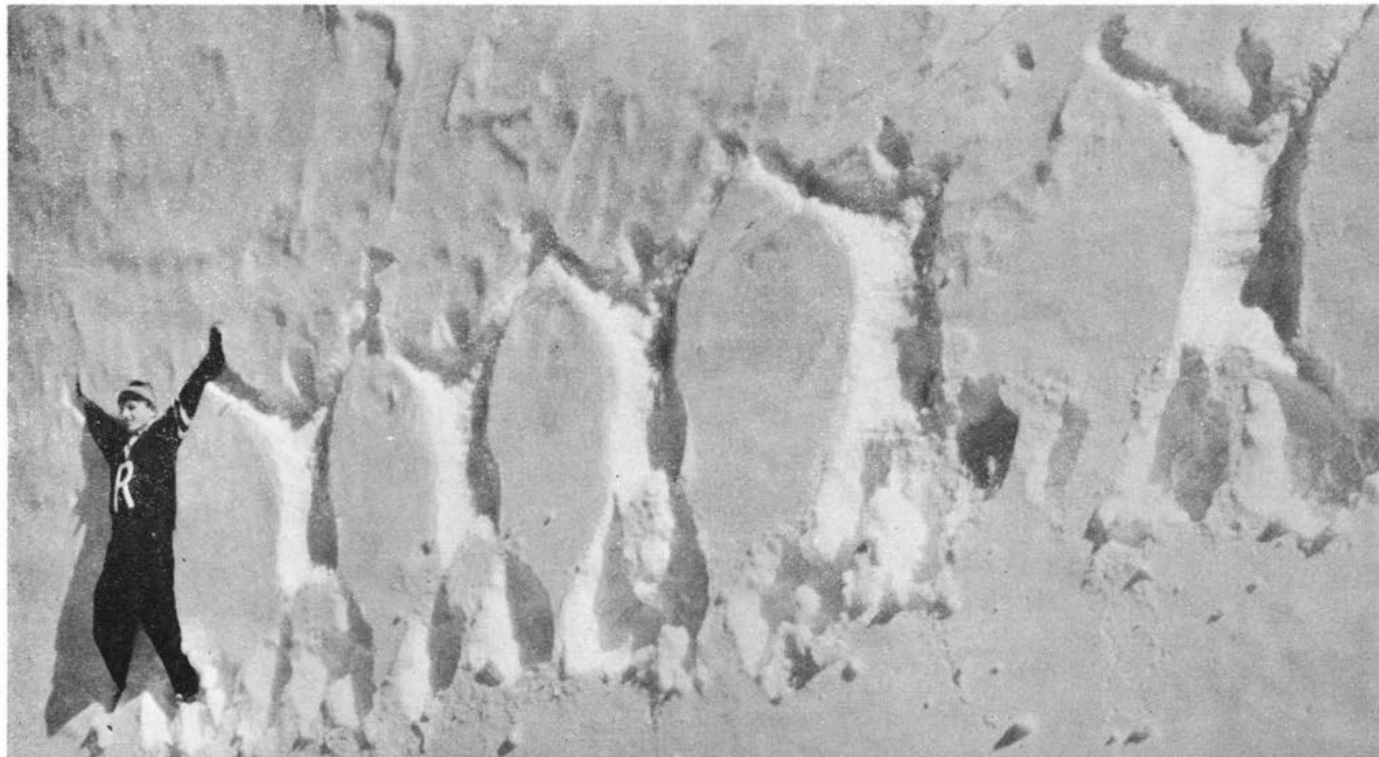
Baratier's earlier feature, *Goha*, was very different, but (looking back) it provided clues. There was something of the same off-beat; a touch of calculated lunacy; a taste for the dramatically decorative which is more fully indulged here. But Baratier is also, from all accounts and on the evidence of his own short films, a serious-minded man, so it is excusable to try to find some sense or meaning behind the nonsense; a political or philosophical allegory beneath the wild, tangential, inconsequent narrative. But any meaning there may be is, to say the least, elusive. At a first viewing, with no subtitles to help with the fast and difficult dialogue, it seemed, if anything, a little clearer than it does now, with all the words explained. Very Audiberti, you might think.

As a Dadaist and androgynous *divertissement* it has its pleasures. Jacques Dufilho is quite funny as a dreadful old crone oscillating in a bent-wood rocker and crooning a choral commentary. Zbigniew Cybulski comically parodies his own role in *Ashes and Diamonds*. Sonne Teal, the celebrated Parisian female impersonator (of American origin) who plays the dual role of the wife and the *poupée*, is a fascinating monster. As the coquette at her toilet; as the Marlene-type night-club singer; bare-bottomed and enticingly evading rape in the woods; draped in crimson and leading the masses to revolt—Pankhurst crossed with Dorothy Ward, Douglas Byng with Boadicea—he (or she) is grandly comic.

The film is a nonsense-world of its own; and taken at the level of a monstrous gag, accepted without effort, it can be effortlessly enjoyable. All that nags the conscience and the critical parts is the fear that Baratier intended it to be something more.

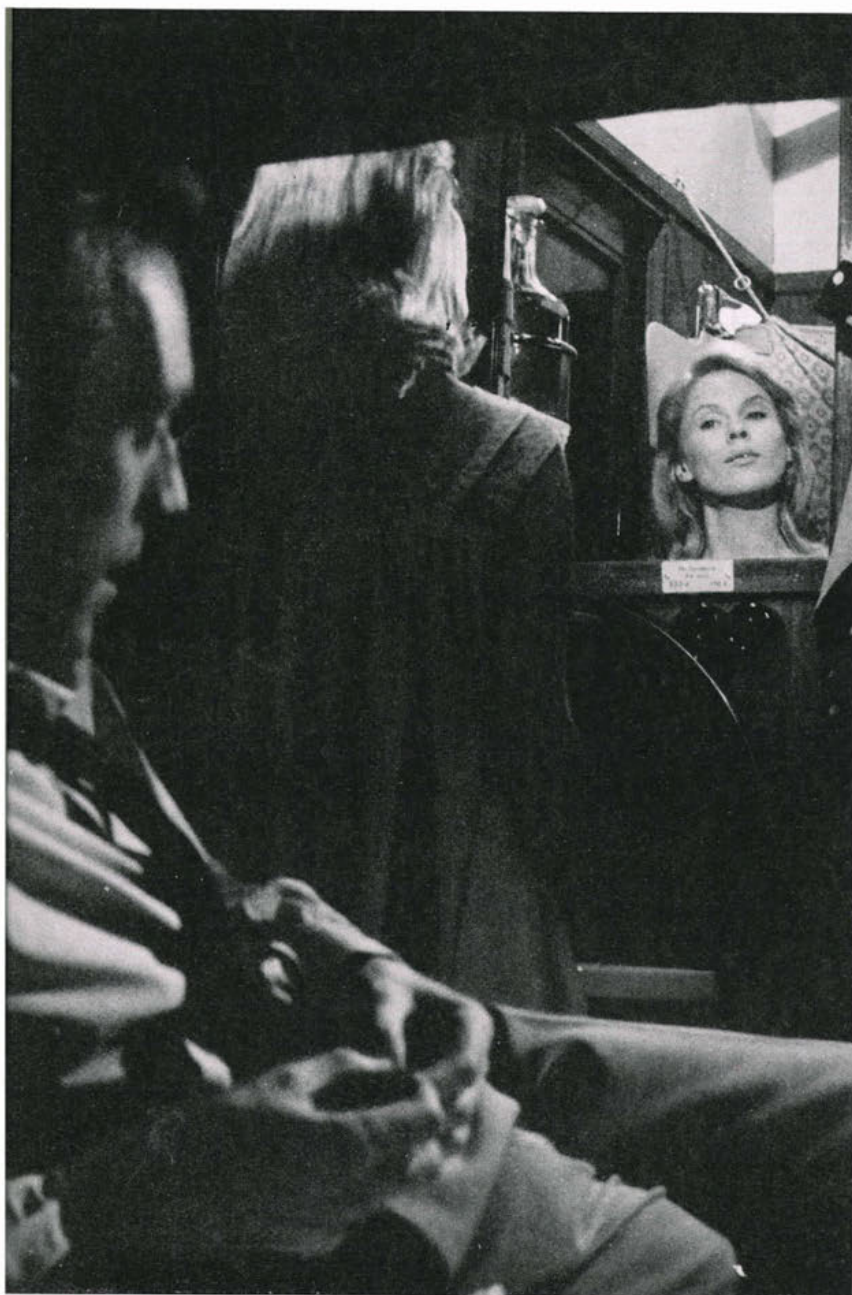
DAVID ROBINSON

Boy in the snow: Ermanno Olmi's "Time Stood Still".



AFTER BERGMAN...

VERNON YOUNG



THE FILM SEASON IN Sweden was initiated last autumn by a conference, on television, of producers and directors whose professed programme for the future was the creation of a Swedish film industry not dependent for its prestige on the films of Ingmar Bergman—"a non-Bergman film industry," they called it, laughingly. The laughter was a trifle hollow; little previous acquaintance with the situation here was necessary to detect the malice which is never far below the marbled surface of Swedish jocularity. Thereafter, the nominations for this reform have appeared at the rate of one or two a month. So far, Bergman's eminence is safe.

The opening spectacle of the year, if we make less trouble for ourselves by excluding Arne Mattsson's *Wax Doll* to begin with (adding "preposterous" to a foreign censor's verdict, "morbid and unhealthy")—the opening spectacle was a film *intentionally* made for juveniles: *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*. There seemed in advance to be no reason why this should not have been an enchanting film, in the vein of Swedish pastoral, the make-believe given wings with all the technical resources which evoked the supernatural in *The Phantom Carriage* (either the 1920 or the 1958 version): an aerial tour of the Swedish landscape, using the subterfuge of a small boy's flight on a wild goose. With a few arch concessions to tourism, Albert Lamorisse had made, in *Voyage au Ballon*, a poetic travelogue with moments of great beauty and many of rare wit, from a comparable sortie. In fact it was Lamorisse's example rather than Selma Lagerlöf's tale which convinced Kenne Fant, the producer-director, that a Swedish variant might be a good bet. It was—commercially.

What went wrong in every other respect is easier to note than wholly to explain. Everything went wrong. It should be possible when reporting a film promoted with such pith and enterprise to say *something* favourable. But even with M. Lamorisse helping to supervise, the wonderful adventure never got off the ground, so to speak; there is no wonder in it, no adventure and technically it's a fiasco. To enumerate solecisms—the crude fabrication of the goose, the painful voice impersonations, the bad dubbing, the uninventiveness of camera perspectives, the dreadful colour, the clumsy editing and matching-up, the bewildering changes of season within a sequence—this becomes really a superfluous exercise. All lift, levity and wildness, all feeling of metamorphosis—indispensable to a fairy tale—was wanting. The boy, Nils, remained

"Alskärinnan": Bibi Andersson and Max von Sydow.

impenitently a product of the Swedish suburb, 1962, clearly unmoved by any phenomenon more remarkable than a moving staircase. The Stockholm reviewers did their shocked best (I can't believe they were genuinely credulous) to meet the demands of an advertising campaign so vociferous and expensive as to constitute intimidation in the American manner. Then the press of cities where mollification buttered no parsnips was heard from and duly quoted (Uppsala, the university town, for instance). Two days after the film critic of *Dagens Nyheter* (Stockholm's leading newspaper) had walked her tightrope of discretion, the publisher of the paper, himself, proscribed her caution with a boreal but delicately phrased blast of his own. Financially, the film's returns have not been diminished by the minority recoil. The local first-run endured from mid-September to the new year, the film had been pre-sold, sight unseen, in Germany—perhaps elsewhere. Perhaps a universal illusion still prevails that the kiddies don't know the difference between one grade of fantasy and another. I could be wrong on this subject; I think they're not yet so debased in hearing and sight. I'd like to say the film is no worse than Disney—but "Amen" sticks in my throat.

Alskarinnan (*The Mistress*) is a bid for the International-Sophisticated market. Vilgot Sjöman has long wanted to make a French film in Sweden. Now he has made it (well, you know, like "Harris-type tweed"), with liberal assistance from the styles of Bergman and Antonioni. We are not supposed to suggest that Bergman did any more than advise, but this strategy conceals the author about as successfully as a pair of smoked glasses: it doesn't even fool a neutral Swede. About four years ago Sjöman wrote a script, *Play on the Rainbow*, about a youngish couple having a trial run of free love; the girl decides she wants to play for keeps and the young man makes up his mind too late. To the vindictive applause of collegiate females in the audience, she walks out on him (rather, she flies out—she has an exchange scholarship with which she escapes to America). The script, Sjöman's first, had little provision in it for cinematic treatment, an omission not repaired by the director. It owed whatever conviction it projected to the performance of Mai Zetterling and, to a lesser extent perhaps, to that of Alf Kjellin. Intelligent in its analysis, the film lacked all sense of life going on anywhere in places where people meet, talk, eat, work or study.

Alskarinnan, written and directed by Sjöman, corrects the cinematic deficiency of the earlier film by throwing out virtually all the discursive content and giving a cinematographic summary of a dilemma not appreciably different, except that in this one the difficulty of Bibi Andersson's choice has been compounded by there being two suitors. One of them is married and unlikely to alter the status; the other is a drab youngster (Lars Ekborg) not forceful enough to be a very interesting problem, though we fail to understand why she regards him as any more inept than the older man, played by Max von Sydow as if he were a pastor in one of those lugubrious communities memorialised by Ibsen. In fact we never learn *who* he is, precisely, and while it may not always be imperative to know the occupation of a character it might, in this case, help us to understand the secret of his charm, since this clearly can't be sexual. (At one point he dashes in for an assignation with Bibi, explaining breathlessly, "I've only got twenty minutes!") There wasn't a laugh in the house.) If there were enough content in this film to engage, we might say that the premise is outrageous: that it's important which of the two males this light-headed and self-important teaser chooses. But the whole affair is so empty and the girl is so sketchily revealed that further speculation is stillborn. What remains are many handsomely mounted and syncopated shots, reminiscent of Bergman's middle period and of late Antonioni—a clean well-lighted face swimming in rectangles as absolute as those of Mondrian, a train's express progress reflected, for no cogent

reason, by its speeding chiaroscuro on a railroad-crossing barrier, Bibi contemplating a tank of tropical fish, presumably analogical.

* * *

The social levels of *Chans* (which means *Chance*)—Gunnar Hellström, director—are at least substantiated. Mainly they are circumscribed by the world of the *raggare* (i.e. the female Teddyboy?), that urban freak born of our time in every city of the West, its traits and costume no different in Sweden: the compulsive outsider, the I-hate-my-sex clothing (dirty hair, blue jeans and a bust-moulding T-shirt for the distaff side), the pitifully histrionic toughness, the infantile illusion of being both photogenic and a deadly threat, the motor-cycle as sublimation of crime and/or sex. The girl in *Chance* comes out of a detention home at the opening of the film and inscribes a circular route back to it; with some relief, one infers. We are given a flashback of how she was first seduced by a big leering uncle, then we're off on a journey to Skane, in the south of Sweden, but I was never sure this wasn't part of the flashback and neither was anyone else I consulted whose language barrier is lower than mine. Eventually she gets to Stockholm, where she is slapped around by her gang associates, meets a young man of artistic bent and good breeding but gives neither him nor herself a chance to understand why she's doomed to stay in her rut; she gets dangerously involved with an élite circle of narcotic peddlers and is returned to the detention home for not reporting to the Parole Board.

The makers of this film, which is not, thank heaven, offered as Social Democratic Party propaganda (unless they're getting too subtle for me, and if they're getting that subtle they'll earn no votes regionally), none the less seemed to fear



Jarl Kulle in Bjarne Henning-Jensen's "Pan".

that it wasn't going to be sensational without a fancy treatment. For the first fifteen minutes there's scarcely a shot which isn't tilted, raked, overhead or at doormat level, and the music imposes itself as immodestly. As of 1928, in Germany, it would have qualified as a work of art, with no continuity further. As Hellström gets into the thick of the narrative, however, he relaxes a little, never enough to let us relax, too, but sufficiently to allow reality to pound at you in very skilful close-ups and brilliant inter-sequence cuts. The fact is that after a while actuality gets the better of the lighting experts and the scrupulous editor: they are unequal to the task of eliminating a great deal of sordid conviction that breaks through from the content.

There's an especially good close-up scene of the girl during sexual intercourse in a car, an act to which she submits with a mixture of curiosity and of well-here-it-is-again-I-might-have-known. Unlike the famous *divertimento* in *Extase*, there's no removal of focus to photograph poetic correlatives: the camera doesn't leave the girl's face—for what this is worth as a milestone of realism. There's another moment when a "cokie" gives himself an injection, equally immediate, and just as disturbing to watch. What all this adds to more than



Lars Ekborg and Harriet Andersson in "Siska".

sado-masochism and the resolve to be frank at all costs I don't know. I can't say it lacks drive and tenacity, but I'm not sure how much of it would seem probable to anyone outside Sweden. Personally I don't doubt that the shabby-criminal fringe exists with much the same style as is shown in this film, yet as I watched it, conceding the plausibility of occasional scenes, I didn't really believe in it. I find all attempts at sub-social realism in the Swedish film fairly incredible; I think because film directors who, being Swedish, must *urge* passions into being, take it all more seriously than the social principals would. If you are privy to this recognition, you are left with a disparity between the moral indifference of Swedish life and the moral insistence of those who try to give it an edge of damnation it doesn't ever express. Thus, Hellström's film, which does grope for social verisimilitude at the only rung where emotion gets a foothold at all, remains on the whole as cold in its dynamics as in its sympathies. We're never given any reason to suppose that the girl could be rehabilitated save by a psychiatrist, which makes the conflict elements of the story rather futile and one-sided.

Even so, Hellström gets under the skin of his subject, while photographing the skin to perfection. What's very surprising in a Swedish movie is the way that the scenes between the girl and the young man of good family ring true. And the film offers a hostage for the future of the industry in the person of Lillevi Bergman, the most unaffected performer since Harriet Andersson came out of Söder. She's the real sullen quiescently vital thing and she never *acts* during a foot of the way. What can be done with her before she acquires the range and style necessary for playing a human being is everyone's question, including her own. Wisely she's now taking drama training, which argues, besides shrewdness, a confession of limitations quite unusual in the young. If she assimilates training without being overpowered by it, she'll be a boon to Swedish films, badly in need of a youngster to replace their only present ingenue, Christina Schollin.

A short film *reklam* (i.e. advertisement) has been going the rounds of Swedish movie houses, whereof the "gimmick" is a mock-serious study of someone going quietly mad from typewriter noises, or something equally baleful supposed by the scenarist to afflict the nerves of the Swedish office worker. The climax of this little fable, always photographed with enhanced values and haunted features intensely within the close-up plane, is an echo-chamber voice recommending, "DIS-PRIL!!!" (a local form of aspirin). *Siska*, another of those Independent Woman problem films from the Bergman stable, is a kind of full-length *reklam* of Dispril. Within a very short time you know that nobody in the film is suffering from anything more serious than a headache.

Script by Sjöman and Ulla Isaaksson; story, the Same Old: girl breaching her Thirties who wants to belong to herself but suffers pangs sharp enough to make her try too hard to belong to someone else, too, and naturally picks men who are easy to reject when they get difficult. The ten-year-old daughter of a psychologist without a licence for practising depth-psychiatry would find no surprises in the development and inconclusive conclusion of this film. *Siska* (a girl's name) is just as impeccably directed as *Alskarinnan*—by Alf Kjellin—and it submits Harriet Andersson to a trial by close-up reactions which she undergoes with extraordinary resources for differentiation. To no avail. *Siska*'s anti-male ambivalence is as overcharged as a Victorian defence of the attributes of Feminism, which soon leaves us indifferent to the degree of self-understanding she acquires. The young man who is hopefully training her to bit and bridle already has woman problems (ex-wife and mother) to live down or see through. Regrettably, for our undivided attention, he is played by Lars Ekborg—again—the face least likely to succeed with registrations of *angst* or even with a moderate degree of tortured speculation. As usual, what we hopefully think of as *milieu* is resumed in a few gratuitous exchanges calculated to represent the world at large, one of them during a Stockholm subway rush hour, which no director of whatever ingenuity could succeed in making appear more than mildly distracting. Another, significantly, is enacted at a suburban cemetery.

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Pan, or *Short is the Summer*, as they call it here, is a co-production which goes to show that desperation is not the exclusive property of Swedish movie-makers. The director of this film is Danish, Bjarne Henning-Jensen; he filmed it on location in Norway with a half-Swedish, half-Norwegian cast, and he did nothing to alleviate the extreme improbabilities which characterise the plot of the novel by Knut Hamsun on which the film is based. If my recollection is sound, the novel had a somewhat mystical quality, achieved partly by virtue of Hamsun's not specifying his characters too naturalistically, partly by allowing narrative and nature description to carry more weight than dialogue. The setting is remote, the consequences of human encounter are violent. Lieutenant Glahn arrives at a rather primitive settlement on the Norwegian coast, craving restoration of his spirit in this wilderness. Before

the summer is over—that Scandinavian summer which, according to all their novelists, playwrights and film-makers, brings love and death as surely as it brings back wild geese—he has destroyed one woman, hardened the already adamant heart of another and been responsible for the death of his own hunting dog—an English setter, the only rational, and the most beautiful, creature in the film story.

Hamsun's tone of remoteness helps, in the book, to reduce the paraphrasable absurdity of the plot. We accept it as we accept the world of Ibsen: intensity of frustrated human relationship become psychopathic for want of social liberation. The first thing Henning-Jensen did was to eliminate from the situation all contingencies which would preserve credence. He moved the period of the story from c. 1880 to our own time, thereby exposing the events to a merciless logic which is nonetheless ignored by all the characters involved. They behave as if it were impossible for them to leave their island and as if sexual choice were so limited and hedged by opportunity and convention that only violence could modify it. Nobody ever says the one sensible thing which would prevent a crescendo of misunderstanding from mounting to fatality. Since fatality is indispensable to the story as Hamsun wrote it, the impasse is ineluctable and, in its details, nonsensical. Even granted the willed perversity of contemporary Norwegians and Swedes far from the madding crowd, it's rather unlikely that a half-dozen or so people, city-bred for the most part, would be quite as untouched, for better or worse, by rational principles of conduct. The basic premise, however, on which the film's credibility is founded, is our consent that Jarl Kulle, as "Pan"-Glahn, is sufficiently Dionysian to be irresistible by every female within range of his invisible cloven hoofs. But it isn't personal prejudice toward Kulle which convinces me that Glahn must be a pretty feeble-minded kind of wilderness man when he can empty a gun into the air in the vicinity of a porous mountain-side and provoke an avalanche which, incidentally, buries one of the infatuated women in his life. If this dim-witted climax came from the Hamsun original—I don't now remember—no director-scenarist is under obligation to retain it.

Otherwise the coastal scenery, in colour, is there to be appreciated, and so is Liv Ullman, a young Norwegian actress with a refreshingly naïve personality who plays the rural wife summarily dispatched by Glahn's misfire. (I don't think a Freudian reading helps the coincidence very much.) Personally, I loved that kinetic dog and I sympathised with Bibi Andersson's effort to make sense out of a senseless and utterly selfish young woman, though I do think that Miss Andersson is far from life-prepared to portray the succession of complex pigheads she is being forced into playing.

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A film reporter here has recently drawn fire on himself for asserting that Swedish films could not only be made more inexpensively but also that they would be better if they weren't so well-made, so photographically flawless. The opposition knows enough to write him down on that score, but it hasn't the faintest notion of *why* Swedish films are, by and large, bad—assuming that they recognise them to be as bad as outsiders claim. If they did know, the self-knowledge might have long since improved the product. When composition and lighting are the only felicities in a film there are few critics anywhere who will not hold that formal perfection is the *cause* of the film's insufficiency. Nobody of influence in Sweden is going to arrive at the simple equation that their films have no life because Swedish society has no life. Almost any Swedish director can make a film more expertly than Tony Richardson, but *A Taste of Honey* is a film about love. Swedes know nothing about love; they have made notable films about the death of love.

But there are particular as well as general pressures re-

sponsible for the crisis today. Ingmar Bergman, until lately the greatest asset of Sweden's film industry, is covertly recognised as its present greatest deterrent. His own films have been conceived and executed with unmistakable integrity (Mrs. Gilliatt has an unkind belief that when, in her opinion, he errs, he does so from perversity or because he's "intellectual"), but this integrity is a threat if by imperceptible stages it grades into fanaticism. There's a pronounced feeling among Swedish film-makers, never declared publicly, of course, that Bergman's tacit control of Svensk-Film's policy is in this way limiting. It's commonly believed that a director or scenarist at Svensk-Film who isn't going the Bergman way—and this definitely applies to Hellström—will go nowhere. The situation has its sardonic aspects. Jorn Donner, a political writer who has been trying his hand at film criticism, made a short film himself, not long ago, at the Svensk-Film studio. By protocol it had to be approved by Bergman. When looking at the film with Donner, so runs the tale, he suggested that a certain sequence in it be removed, it was too face-front static, like television (or sequences in Bergman's *Smiles of a Summer Night*?). Donner refused to comply and took himself to the newly reorganised Europa company. It sounds heroic, but one



Lillevi Bergman in Gunnar Hellström's "Chance".

wonders what Donner would have done if Europa had not been there to welcome him.

What bearing *The Communicants*, Bergman's new film, may have on all this, we can't predict. If it's another masterpiece the circumstance will not alleviate the resentful depression which characterises industry gossip. How many directors might be expected materially to alter the prospect in Sweden if scenarios were available and operation untrammelled is hard to say. Hans Abramson, Ake Falck and Hans Lagerkvist have done good things on television; there's Gunnar Hellström and there's Hasse Ekman, who lacks ideas but who has become an adroit technician. And there is Arne Mattsson, who is impressive when given material for which he has a passion (usually low-life and rural); in any other direction he gets lost. But it's altogether clear that fewer films of any note can be made in Sweden while the social life from which they must be inspired is so empty of value, so inhibited from any gratuitous expression of concern or of pleasure, and while no film artist as dedicated as Bergman is being developed who can *will* subject matter into film form.

BOOK REVIEWS

LESSONS WITH EISENSTEIN, by Vladimir Nizhny. Translated and edited by Ivor Montagu and Jay Leyda. Illustrated. (Allen and Unwin, 25s.)

IVAN THE TERRIBLE. A screenplay by Sergei M. Eisenstein. Translated by Ivor Montagu and Herbert Marshall. Edited by Ivor Montagu. Illustrated. (Secker and Warburg, 50s.)

IN THIS COUNTRY, where we are still waiting for a properly established Film School so that the cinema remains essentially Teach-Yourself, the student whose appetite has been whetted by Ernest Lindgren's *The Art of the Film* is bound for frustration when he comes to look for further theoretical and practical reading. Outside the Soviet Union, with their forty-five years of film teaching, there is practically no writing of cinema pedagogy. The student must therefore turn to *The Film Sense*, *Film Form* and *Film Direction* and *Film Acting*. But Pudovkin will tell him that real-life types are always to be preferred to actors and that there is no artistic future for the talking film, and thereupon change his mind on both scores without a real resolution of the issues involved; while Eisenstein's literary and intellectual *jeux de feu* tend to be bewildering and elusive to minds trained in English disciplines of cultural matter-of-fact. Kuleshov's writings have never been available here.

Lessons with Eisenstein goes further towards filling the gap than its author (who died quite young, while the book was in the press) may have anticipated. It consists of a selection of records of Eisenstein's classes at the State Institute of Cinematography, made over a period, apparently, of several terms in 1928-9. The class—in its designated role of "twenty-headed director"—is guided through four practical problems. The first, entitled "Directorial Solution," analyses the essence, for the film director, of the scene of Vautrin's arrest in *Le Père Goriot*. The second and best, "Mise-en-Scène," breaks down a single incident from the Haiti revolt—a French attempt to ambush Dessalines—to discover its dramatic logic and geography. The same *mise-en-scène* is, in the third section, broken up into shots and (what is more important) into what Eisenstein calls "shot-units," the paragraphing, as it were, of each sequence. The final chapter of the book, "Mise-en-shot," is an exercise in devising a way of composing a whole incident, the murder of the moneylender from *Crime and Punishment*, into one shot.

What is important, of course, is not the matter of the exercises, but the method they demonstrate. The editors have appended a paper "On the method of teaching the subject of film direction" which Eisenstein prepared in the mid-thirties, and which has in part furnished a model for the present system of the State Institute of Cinematography. "We have had to risk a cold sound," says Mr. Leyda, introducing it; and it is true that the document has the ring of a formal official paper. Eisenstein was too well read to need to draw so often on Lenin, Stalin and Engels for dialectic illustration; and one feels that as an artist he was not so deeply committed to such a narrow political outlook as the syllabus from time to time acknowledges. Nor can one help but recall Mayakowski's Madame Mesalliansova (who hopefully suggested that the decadence of bourgeois civilisation might best be illustrated by arranging exhibitions of the fox-trot, the latest Parisian fashions and a belly-dance). It cannot have been for purely ideological reasons that Eisenstein wanted to show his students the fruits of the bourgeois cinema, "1. The adventure film; 2. The comic film; 3. Melodrama and naïve realism . . ."

Much of the syllabus (for instance the first division, "Work on Oneself") reveals a debt to the Stanislavsky methods; but the key to Eisenstein's own teaching, as Nizhny's book illustrates it, is "a special form of study—Directorial Practice. Directorial Practice has as its object the creative resolution of each given task, together

with the supervision of the corresponding division of creative practice, by the method of collective discussion." The supervisor of studies shows his students

"How to deduce the creative compositional solution exhaustively correct for the given conditions. Starting from this single concrete solution, he reveals the general law pertaining to it . . ." The method "habituates the students to think in a disciplined manner, in essentials and in application to the concrete instance and task. In such studies one of the teacher's main tasks in regard to the systematic selection of consequential tasks is to play the guiding role, and intelligently to draw the listeners into creative, inventive statements, and to direct discussion along a ruthlessly rational line . . ."

These classes take the form of Socratic dialogue (occasionally, as the English editors point out, it sounds like *Sandford and Merton* too) between teacher and pupils, and the aim is to bring a Socratic method to the problem of discovering film form for the desired content. ("Always pose the task in terms of content," Eisenstein advises his students.) Each task must in the first place be stated as a problem; then a choice must be made between alternative solutions of that problem. Shall the table at the Maison Vauquier be round, or square, or rectangular? Shall Dessalines enter here, or there? A long shot or a medium shot? The essence of Eisenstein's teaching is to organise into logical form the artist's eventual basic problem of selection. If the student reading this book can gain no more from it than this, he will have learned a good deal. It is not certain that he will be able to derive, beyond this, a fair portrait of Eisenstein, the man. He emerges from Nizhny's book as a figure more formidable than attractive; sharp rather than acute, waspish rather than impish, not entirely genial. But maybe it's the fate of teachers to look like that.

Lessons with Eisenstein is a useful gloss to the screenplay of *Ivan the Terrible*. The insight it offers into Eisenstein's processes of visualisation makes much greater sense of his idiosyncratic way of writing a script in brief broken lines which look—and sometimes even read—like blank verse. The translation overcomes remarkably successfully the problems of rendering Eisenstein's pseudo-archaism. An appendix helpfully reminds the reader how the finished films (Parts I and II) depart from the original scenario: the scenario itself sets him longing hopelessly for the unfinished third part. Ivor Montagu's introduction is a finely comprehensive appreciation of the film, though a shade too ready to apologise for its defects. Imperfect it must be; but its grandeur is enough to be in no need of apologia or defence against the detractors of the dark days preceding Eisenstein's death. The book—beautifully illustrated with Dombrovsky's stills and Eisenstein's own sketches—is in itself a handsome tribute.

DAVID ROBINSON

THE PLAYER: a profile of an art. By Lillian Ross and Helen Ross. Illustrated. (Simon and Schuster, New York, \$6.95.)

LILLIAN ROSS'S "PICTURE" ESTABLISHED her reputation as a sort of walking tape-recorder, with the tape-recorder's special power, when playing back a conversation, to make it sound just a little sillier than it probably did the first time round. In *The Player*, a gentler and kinder book, she and her sister Helen Ross have interviewed 55 actors, employing what they call "the traditional manner" (i.e., no tape-recorder) in an attempt to build up a composite picture of an art. Joan Crawford rubs shoulders with Zero Mostel, Lee Remick with Donald Pleasence, Richard Widmark with Vladimir Sokoloff; the range is wide, and the book's method is to cut out all contributions by the interviewer herself, so that each entry is presented in the first person, part autobiography, part opinions and impressions. The book makes easy reading, *New Yorker* profile style, though one would often like to know rather more about the line of questioning, the opportunities given the talkers to develop ideas in any kind of depth. One gets the wide-eyed approach (acting is just wonderful); the Method approach, with numerous tributes to Kazan and Lee Strasberg; the strictly business approach ("I can act only in films, and even there I'm limited. I think of myself as a fair contemporary actor-reporter of scenes in which people pretty much like me figure"—William Holden). What one doesn't get is the "balanced and definitive picture of the art of acting" proposed by the authors, although within their terms of reference this was scarcely to be hoped for.

Biographical generalisations: pretty well everyone represented here seems to have started young, with infant memories of kindergarten dressing-up; a fair proportion come from families with an

interest in music; no one admits to any kind of mathematical ability; and hardly anyone who has done both gets anything like the satisfaction out of film acting that he does from the stage. A few representative quotations . . . From Joan Crawford: "I knew that if certain words or phrases stuck in my throat, I could call a little conference right on the set and have them changed to suit me better . . . I knew that the writer would be grateful to me. His words were dead words. They were brought to life by me." From Angela Lansbury: "I never felt I was that rare-orchid kind of thing. With me it's always been a matter of being ready to work at nine o'clock and achieving what I can." From Anthony Perkins: "When I first became a little well known and had a day when I was feeling down, I'd actually say to myself 'Well, I think I'll go out for a walk and be recognised.'" From Henry Fonda: "Acting is putting on a mask. The worst torture that can happen to me is not having a mask to get in back of." The disadvantage of the Rosses' "traditional" method, in this age of tape-recorded interviews, is that everyone seems to come out talking rather the same, in short, crisp and rather improbably lucid sentences. There is nothing "definitive" about *The Player*; but there are revealing gleams of intelligence, vulnerability, egotism, a pervasive air of honesty and conviction, along with a *Who's Who* range of biographical detail.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

BOOKS RECEIVED

COSTUME THROUGH THE AGES. Introduced by James Laver. (Thames and Hudson, 12s 6d.)

MICHELANGELO ANTONIONI. By Ian Cameron. (Movie Magazine, Ltd., 3s. 6d.)

OF STREETS AND STARS. By Alan Marcus. (Houghton Mifflin, Boston, \$4.50.)

PICTURE. By Lillian Ross. (Penguin Books, 3s 6d.)

PROCES DE JEANNE D'ARC. By Robert Bresson. (René Julliard, Paris, 15 N.F.)

QU'EST-CE QUE LE CINEMA? Vol. IV. By André Bazin. (Editions du Cerf, Paris, 7.80 N.F.)

SCREEN EDUCATION YEAR BOOK, 1963. (SEFT Publications, 5s.)

CORRESPONDENCE

Gamesmanship

The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND

SIR,—Although Arlene Croce's review of *Lolita* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Autumn, 1962) was a bit more laudatory than some, there was still a trace of the premise that the film *Lolita* was simply an attempt to reproduce the book. Such a premise—though present in many reviews—neglects Mr. Nabokov's obsession with puzzles within puzzles within puzzles. We contend that Mr. Nabokov created a new work, and that he never intended to film the book. In fact, we believe the film was meant to ensnare, among others, those who carried the book with them. Thus many viewers and reviewers may have missed the proverbial Trolley.

Miss Croce's criticisms pinpointed Kubrick's "perfunctory misguided lunges at eroticism," "much too flossy main-title pedicure," the collapsible cot sequence, and "indulgence of Peter Sellers" as sore spots marring an otherwise good film. We prefer to believe that Mr Nabokov has preserved the names and much of the action, but has altered all the characters of *Lolita* to provide a variation on a theme. It is this alteration that Miss Croce sometimes misconstrued as faulty direction. Mr. Nabokov's new treatment is evident in at least one new strain.

The pedicure sequence opens the film, with Humbert (Nabokov) preparing Lolita (a new Lolita) for the film public. After the titles we have one of the final scenes of the book—the murder of Quilty. This scene can be seen as a disguised dialogue between Kubrick (Quilty) and Nabokov (Humbert). Recall that Quilty names himself Spartacus and wears a "toga", and that we later see Quilty with a camera as a constant companion. By this interpretation events and dialogue which appear in the book take on further meaning, so that when Humbert bemoans Quilty's kidnapping of Lolita, the loss signifies both the girl and the book. Quilty tries to engage Humbert

in a game of ping-pong. Perhaps this is the game of film-making. Later in the same scene Quilty suggests that they write a "popular song" together, Quilty supplying the classical Polonaise melody, and suggesting that Humbert write the lyrics (script). The encounter ends with the shooting of Quilty as Humbert avenges the kidnapping of Lolita—and *Lolita* (Kubrick is killed by Nabokov's wit). The death shots are fired through a painting of a young girl (masterpiece or reproduction?), defacing *Lolita*.

This sort of key works for other scenes also. Quilty's Viennese psychologist convinces Humbert that Lolita must be allowed out in public—allowed to appear in the "school play". That is, Lolita must not be the Lolita of Humbert's incestuous sheets, but the Lolita of Quilty's play (Kubrick's film). In fact, the piano teacher remarks on the success of the "play," remarking that the symbolism might have been a bit obscure. In the same scene Quilty is snapping pictures of Lolita. The meeting of Mrs. Schiller and Humbert can be subjected to the same sort of analysis. In this scene too, Quilty's multiple identity is alluded-to when Dolly tells Humbert that Quilty was on his way to Hollywood to make an extravaganza (*Spartacus*) when she joined him.

As for the key sequence at "The Enchanted Hunters," we would say the following. Indeed the flower show and religious convention of the book have been replaced with the police convention of the film, and so how can *Lolita* be erotic in the sense of the book when the hotel is swarming with police? Once again Quilty's "cadenza" is quite to the point—and not a cadenza at all, since it is a play on "normality". Quilty's pose as a policeman may be director Kubrick himself imposing the censorship. The folding-cot sequence was not mere failure at comedy, as Miss Croce stated. The situation is set for sex, and the breathing alters. Expectation is deflected into laughter. Both the audience and Mr. Nabokov have laughed—both a little unhappily. But Nabokov laughs last as Lolita tickles Humbert in an anti-climax.

We realise that this type of exegesis can be attempted in many ways, and it might be interesting to try Quilty as Nabokov, with Humbert as Kubrick, or both Quilty and Humbert as Nabokov. With all of this, there is certainly more than this type of "inside" motif we have offered. Perhaps the film should be examined again for bigger game.

Yours faithfully,

WILLIAM SCHIFF
JESSE SMITH
LORIE RYBACK

Ithaca, New York,
U.S.A.

Blighty Attitudes

SIR,—One glaringly important mis-statement in David Robinson's otherwise fine article, "The Old Lie", in your Autumn, 1962, issue requires comment. I refer to the sentence that "Griffith was too bedevilled with Blighty attitudes, too committed to 'the old lies,' in his filming of *Hearts of the World*."

Mr. Robinson cites "The Griffith Index", Part V, *Hearts of the World*, which, as you may recall, the British Film Institute published in 1947, to describe the reasons for Griffith's reconstruction of some of the West Front battle scenes, after he had returned to California and had discovered that some of the real-life news-shots "were not in the least exciting when seen on the screen." It is a pity, therefore, Mr. Robinson omitted the rest of it: that is, that the film was made in the first place as a bit of calculated, deliberate and grand scale screen propaganda, designed to persuade the isolationist-minded American public of the period to accept and support with their energies, their money, and their lives the Allied cause against Germany and the other Entente powers. The so-called Blighty attitudes were all a part of it, and they were not invented by Griffith: they were the attitudes and the viewpoints which the British propaganda-machine disseminated throughout the United States at the time, and which all but a rabid pro-German minority then believed.

Furthermore, *Hearts of the World* was not so late in appearing that, as Mr. Robinson states, it "can almost be accounted (a) post-war production." It was first shown in the United States on April 4th, 1918, and the war did not end until seven months later. At the time *Hearts of the World* first appeared, the First World War was at its height, raging on many fronts, and no one had any idea when it would ever end. The film was released as a result in scores of American cities, almost simultaneously, and the release was subsequently intensified or "stepped-up" in overflow houses to enable the film to accomplish the maximum degree of its avowed propagandistic purpose. *Hearts of the World*, its calculated purpose, and the First World War, all were so organically inter-

linked, that when the Armistice was signed on November 11th, the film's bookings were abruptly terminated and the continuing current successful runs were cancelled . . .

Yours faithfully,
SEYMOUR STERN

Hollywood 28,
California.

The Legion of Lost Films

SIR,—It is a pity that Mr. Weinberg does not continue his search for lost films. His articles were fascinating.

It might interest the author to know that the conspiracy against Biberman and Wilson's *The Salt of the Earth* did not spread out to Belgium. The film was shown on Belgian National TV (BRT—Dutch speaking network) some years ago; as far as I can remember it was on the occasion of a 1st of May celebration.

About *Homonculus* Mr. Weinberg writes: "Who made it? When was it released? Who saw it? No existing film history that I know of mentions it . . ." In the "Filmographie Sommaire" from Lacos' *Le Fantastique au Cinéma* I find: "1915. Otto Rip(p)ert: *Homonculus, der Führer*." The addition of "der Führer" probably indicates the title of only one of the episodes. In Eisner's *Dämonische Leinwand*: "1916: *Homonculus* (a film serial). Direction: Otto Rippert. Cast: Olaf Föns, Maria Carmi, Theodor Loos, Gustav Kühne." Much more about *Homonculus* is said in Chapter XIII of this book ("Geometry of the Masses"). It is compared with *Metropolis*. I translate freely: "For what concerns the movement of the masses Lang had a predecessor: Otto Rippert, the director of the *Homonculus* films, made in 1916. Too little attention is paid to these films and it is taken for granted that the German classic film was born with *Caligari*." . . . "All elements of the German film art which will develop during the following ten, twelve, years are already announced in the *Homonculus* films."

In *Das gab's nur einmal* Curt Riess writes on p.58 that half of the German films made during the war (1914-1918) were whodunits. "Or adventure stories like Otto Rippert's *The Green Man from Amsterdam*, or the six episode film *Homonculus*, the story of an

artificial man, very exciting, starring the (Danish) stage actor Olaf Föns."

More about this film can be found in *Cahiers du Cinéma* (Vol.X No.59, May 1956, p.13) in the article by Fereydoun Hoveyda "Grandeur et décadence du serial". Riess and Hoveyda both mention six instead of seven episodes.

Yours faithfully,
R. METZEMAEKERS

Antwerp.

SIR,—Thanks to Mr. Herman G. Weinberg for his interesting article "Legion of Lost Films." Only, I am surprised that he has never found information about the German silent epic *Homonculus* and maintains that this film is not mentioned in any of the film histories he knows. There is information about *Homonculus* in several of them, among others in Kalbus' and Kracauer's books.

Homonculus was a fantastic story about "the artificial man—the man without a soul," filmed as a serial in six parts consisting of four reels each. It was produced by Deutsche Bioscop in 1916 after a novel by one of the company directors, Robert Reinert. Otto Rippert directed, Carl Hoffmann was cameraman and the settings were by Robert A. Dietrich, who also made the settings for Paul Wegener's first versions of *The Student of Prague* and *Golem*. The film was shot in the studios at Neu Babelsberg (the later UFA studios, now belonging to DEFA). The shooting began the 3rd May, 1916 and finished in October the same year. The first part was shown in the early summer of 1916 at Marmorhaus, one of the leading cinemas of Berlin.

Homonculus was from a contemporary point of view quite an impressive film. I saw it in November, 1931 in a retrospective series of German films at the Berlin art cinema Kamera. I believe a print of it still exists in East Germany.

Yours faithfully,
HERBERT STEINTHAL

"Politiken",
Copenhagen.

SIR,—It is for once a pleasure to discredit Mr. Weinberg's amazing erudition on the cinema. *Les Aventures du Roi Pausole* which he mentions as a film which was never completed was in fact distributed in Great Britain in 1933 under the title *The Merry Monarch*. In addition to Jannings the cast included the American Sidney Fox and the Frenchman Armand Bernard, as well as the 365 pretty girls mentioned by Mr. Weinberg. Admittedly the short footage of the film (6,559 feet) suggests salvage work on somebody's part. Nor does the musical comedy style of the film reflect much of the sultry pages of Pierre Louys. Whatever romps may have taken place on Mr. Weinberg's island, they do not seem to have communicated themselves on celluloid. A copy of the film is at present preserved in the National Film Archive, London.

Yours faithfully,
LIAM O'LEARY

Acquisitions Officer,
National Film Archive.

SIR,—Mr. Weinberg has fallen into error over Granowski's *Le Roi Pausole*. This was trade shown by United Artists in London on 22 June 1933 under the title *The Merry Monarch*, and the review in *Kine Weekly* on 29 June 1933 describes it as French, featuring Jannings, Sidney Fox and Armand Bernard, 6,750 feet, and its release date is given as 30 October. Although the "exteriors are truly delightful and the camera work shows imagination" the reviewer thought it light stuff and suitable only for double feature programmes. "The humour is conventional and, although Emil Jannings occasionally reveals touches of rare artistry and gives the airy narrative a powerful pivot, he fails to achieve the impossible and lift the picture out of the rut of orthodox light fare. The dance ensembles, featuring alluring ladies of perfect physique, and delightful backgrounds, however, provide easy entertainment for the majority." *Kine Weekly*, incidentally, in two places gives the number of King Pausole's queens as 366, one for each day of the year—including leap year!

Yours faithfully,
NEVILLE MARCH HUNNINGS

London, W.C.1.

SIR,—Referring to *The Legion of Lost Films*, Part Two, please be advised that Norman McLaren's *Neighbours* must have been cut for export, as it is available intact here in Vancouver. When it was shown on the CBC Television Network, however, it was cut as Mr. Weinberg describes.

The complete *Neighbours* was shown twice at the Festival of

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Contemporary Arts at the University of British Columbia during the last two weeks. The festival also included the Canadian premiere of Ron Rice's *The Flower Thief* and the world premiere of Stan Brakhage's *Star Dog Man: Part One*, which was shown together with *Prelude*, with Mr. Brakhage in attendance. It was generally thought that he was a better speaker than film-maker.

While we expect a screening of *Sin of Jesus* within the next month, we seem to be the last outpost for *Il Posto*, *Il Cristo Proibito*, *The Connection*, *Snobs*, *Kagi* and *Innocent Sorcerers*.

Yours faithfully,
R. KEILLOR

Vancouver,
Canada.

SIR,—I regret to say that Herman Weinberg is misinformed when he states "When Marie Seton tried to see it [*Ivan the Terrible*, Part 2] in Moscow in 1952 she was told it was never shot." I can't imagine how Mr. Weinberg ever came by such misinformation. I was in the U.S. most of 1952. I was not in Moscow and no one ever told me the film was never shot, nor to my knowledge was such an assertion ever made to anyone else.

The facts are as follows: few people saw the film after it was banned as "anti-historical." I always believed *Ivan the Terrible*, Part 2 would in the end be released. In 1956-57 when my friends the Indian directors K. A. Abbas and B. Garga were working on an Indo-Soviet co-production at Mosfilm, I asked them to keep on enquiring if they could see *Ivan the Terrible*, Part 2. Finally a copy was found in the studio itself and they viewed the film there. Mr. Garga later wrote an article for *SIGHT AND SOUND* about the film.

Yours faithfully,
MARIE SETON

Film Institute of India,
Poona 4.

Freaks

SIR,—Delighted to see my letter, and Mr. Weinberg's reply, in your excellent Winter number. Obviously I misunderstood H.G.W.'s remarks about *The Merry Widow*, as I certainly have never seen the details he mentions.

However, something else has been bothering me. I have long had an uneasy feeling that *SIGHT AND SOUND* imagines that Tod Browning's *Freaks* was never released or publicly shown. I'm sure I once read a piece that said all exhibitors boycotted it and it had to be withdrawn. Now you make the remarkable statement that it is "the film everyone has heard of and no one has seen." (Maybe you mean in U.K.)

Well, some exhibitors may have boycotted it, and no doubt some censors banned it, but not all. I know for sure it played in New York, as I read reviews of it from there, including one by Pare Lorentz (later maker of *The Plow that Broke the Plains* and *The River*), at that time critic with *Judge* magazine.

I finally saw the movie as a re-issue after World War II, in Chicago—then later again at an art house in New York City where it was coupled, on an all-Browning bill, with *Dracula*. It's certainly a disturbing and sometimes repellent film, uneven in quality but with a number of sequences of bizarre power and fascination. As you probably know, many real circus freaks were used in this tale of a "normal" woman (Olga Baclanova) who marries a midget (the famous Harry Earles of Browning-Chaney's *The Unholy Three*) for his money, betrays him with the circus strong-man, and suffers a grisly revenge at the hands of her husband's infuriated fellow-freaks. As I recall it they converted her into a sort of bird-woman who herself eventually was put on exhibition. The fate of the male villain was not spelled out in the version I saw, but I recall a review of the original (perhaps only the preview?) version that stated "the strong-man ends up singing tenor." A more conventional love story between Wallace Ford and Leila Hyams ran parallel with all this.

Yours faithfully,
G. G. PATTERSON

Toronto,
Canada.

CORRECTION

By some aberration, Roman Polanski was twice referred to in the Winter *SIGHT AND SOUND* as co-director of *Two Men and a Wardrobe*. He is, of course, the film's only director. Louis Marcorelles has asked us to point out that the Hollywood photographs for his *American Diary* (same issue) were by Robert Florey; and that, in writing about the Canadian Film Board, he referred to Pierre Junot by mistake for Fernand Dansereau.

CAST A COLD EYE

continued from page 87

really, is only an all-too-typical representative. Even the dying man's wife, as played by Jan Sterling, is a sluttish figure without charm or beauty. In this extraordinary film, with its dynamic direction and photography (by Charles Lang Junior), Wilder makes his final, personal statement about life, which he sees as vicious and vile in a way only Buñuel among the cinema's artists has matched. In all the other major Wilder films some minor concessions have been made to sentiment. Edward G. Robinson's insurance boss in *Double Indemnity*, Jane Wyman's Time researcher in *The Lost Weekend*, Nancy Olson's Hollywood studio reader in *Sunset Boulevard*: these people can be said to represent the audience at its most self-flattering, horrified by indecency, trying to help. In *Ace in the Hole* the usual ersatz representative of Mr. and Mrs. Suburbia is notably lacking. As a statement against life, as destructive criticism of human beings, *Ace in the Hole* has rarely been matched in the history of commercial cinema.

* * *

Since this last artistic statement twelve years ago, Wilder has been content to provide a succession of carefully mounted entertainments practically devoid of personal vision. Occasional attempts to recapture the glitter of the early comedies—*Love in the Afternoon*, *Sabrina*, *The Seven Year Itch*—have been respectively adipose, styleless and keyhole-peeping. Only *Some Like It Hot*, a brilliantly funny and brilliantly made farce, suggested the Wilder of the old days. The isolated "prestige picture" (*The Spirit of St. Louis*) could have been directed by any competent film-maker, as could *Stalag 17*, the prison camp comedy-melodrama.

Yawning one's way through the graceless crudities of, say, *The Apartment*, noticing how the sets of offices and flats are still as drab as ever, and the characters—though uninterestingly developed now—as unlikeable, one wonders what has happened to the Wilder of better days. Certainly, his work raises the old question of whether an artist can be against life and still create successfully; and it may well be that, having set out to destroy our last illusions, Wilder has destroyed his own power. Apart from *Some Like It Hot*, there has been no film of his in recent years to make one doubt this. One looks back to the films before 1951 with nostalgia, regretting what has happened to a once formidable gift.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

M-G-M for *Two Weeks in Another Town*, *Lolita*, *Period of Adjustment*, *North by Northwest*.
PARAMOUNT PICTURES for *The Major and the Minor*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Midnight*, *Ace in the Hole*, *Double Indemnity*.
UNITED ARTISTS for *I Could Go On Singing*.
UNITED ARTISTS/MIRISCH for *Irma La Douce*.
WARNER-PATHE for *The Chapman Report*, *Sparrows Can't Sing*, *Rio Bravo*.
20th CENTURY-FOX for *Cleopatra*.
BLC/COLUMBIA for *Lawrence of Arabia*, *Barabbas*.
RANK ORGANISATION for *This Sporting Life*, *Sodom and Gomorrah*.
RANK/UNIVERSAL-INTERNATIONAL for *The Birds*, *Female on the Beach*.
GALA FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *The Eclipse*, *Jules et Jim*.
GALA/CINERIZ for *Eight and a Half*.
ROME-PARIS FILM for *Les Carabiniers*.
SUD PACIFIQUE FILMS for *La Baie des Anges*.
EDISONVOLTA for *Time Stood Still*.
SVENSK FILMINDUSTRI for *Alskarinnan*, *Siska*, *Chans*.
SANDREWS for *Pan*.
DENNIS STOCK for *55 Days at Peking*.
NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE for *Las Hurdes*.

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A GUIDE TO CURRENT FILMS

Films of special interest to *SIGHT AND SOUND* readers are denoted by one, two, three or four stars

- ***ANTIGONE** (*Gala*) Proudly spoken version of Sophocles' tragedy which hovers a little too uncertainly between film and theatre. Impressive moments of staging. (Irene Papas, Manos Katrakis; director, George Tzavellas.)
- BLOOD MONEY** (*BLC/Columbia*) *The Set Up* seen through Marty glasses; or, beneath every heavyweight exterior lies a lonely little soul struggling to get out. A good performance by Jackie Gleason, careful acting by the rest, and New York locations help to balance a sentimentally loaded script. (Anthony Quinn, Julie Harris, Mickey Rooney; director, Ralph Nelson.)
- ***BOCCACCIO 70** (*Fox*) Visconti (fairly on form) and De Sica and Fellini (fairly off) provide a three-episode film whose title hints at a determined sauciness. Pretty much a package movie, with nothing quite living up to the names on the box, though the Visconti section should be seen. (Sophia Loren, Anita Ekberg, Romy Schneider. Eastman Colour.) *Reviewed.*
- COME FLY WITH ME** (*M-G-M*) Predictable, smart-talking comedy travelogue about the love-life of three air hostesses. Karl Malden as a diffident Texan millionaire who inexplicably travels tourist class. (Dolores Hart, Pamela Tiffin, Lois Nettleton, Hugh O'Brian; director, Henry Levin. Metrocolor, Panavision.)
- ***COURTSHIP OF EDDIE'S FATHER, THE** (*M-G-M*) Minnelli returns to his sentimental comedy mood, with Glenn Ford as a widower who tries to get engaged to a fashion consultant but is saved by his small son for the nurse next door. Usual stress on interior decoration; one or two pleasant moments. (Shirley Jones, Stella Stevens. Metrocolor, Panavision.)
- ******ECLIPSE, THE** (*Gala*) More in the line of *La Notte* than *L'Avventura*, *The Eclipse* examines the problem of sex without love in the milieu of the Rome stock exchange. Directed by Antonioni with great pace, concision and—need one add—rigour. (Monica Vitti, Alain Delon.) *Reviewed.*
- ***EL CID** (*Rank*) Solemn pageant about the noble Spanish knight who united Moors and Christians under one king. A likeable cast struggles with two-dimensional characters, and there is an arid hour or two between the film's highlight—a mounted single-combat scene—and its final battle; but Anthony Mann's compositions are often pretty. (Charlton Heston, Sophia Loren, John Fraser. Technicolor, Super-Technirama 70.)
- ***FIRST LOVE** (*Gala*) Dolce teenage vita. The amorous pangs and problems of a group of wealthy high-school kids. Leisurely (very), but attractively acted and quite amusing. (Carla Gravina, Raf Mattioli, Lorella De Luca; director, Mario Camerini.)
- GIRL NAMED TAMIKO, A** (*Paramount*) Laurence Harvey as a sneeringly embittered half-Russian, half-Chinese photographer stranded in Tokyo, balancing affairs with the American girl who can provide the longed-for U.S. passport, and the Japanese girl who reconciles him to true love and Japan for life. (Martha Hyer, France Nuyen, Michael Wilding; director, John Sturges. Technicolor, Panavision.)
- ***HOW THE WEST WAS WON** (*M-G-M/Cinerama*) Bulging with stars and shivering at the seams, the first Cinerama story film mixes eye-catching spectacle with slabs of static narrative. Ford's Civil War sequence comes closest to taming the giant screen. (Debbie Reynolds, James Stewart, Carroll Baker; directors, Henry Hathaway, John Ford, George Marshall. Technicolor.)
- ****I COULD GO ON SINGING** (*United Artists*) American singer, in London to top the bill at the Palladium, catches up with her long-lost son and his father, now an ear, nose and throat specialist. Stunning performance by Judy Garland, who not only makes but *is* the film. (Dirk Bogarde, Aline MacMahon; director, Ronald Neame. Eastman Colour, Panavision.) *Reviewed.*
- ****IT'S ONLY MONEY** (*Paramount*) An occasionally surreal, almost always funny skit on private-eye thrillers. Jerry Lewis, at the mercy of a homicidal butler who proudly claims presidency of the Peter Lorre fan club, ends up pursued by an army of one-eyed, shark-toothed lawnmowers operated by remote control. (Zachary Scott, Joan O'Brien; director, Frank Tashlin.)
- ******KNIFE IN THE WATER** (*Contemporary*) A yachting weekend in Poland, with tensions slowly building between husband, wife and the young hitchhiker they've invited aboard. Nervously taut and brilliant first film by Roman Polanski, director of *Two Men and a Wardrobe*. (Leon Niemczyk, Jolanta Umecka, Zygmunt Malanowicz.)
- ****LAWRENCE OF ARABIA** (*BLC/Columbia*) David Lean, Sam Spiegel and Robert Bolt's massive reconstruction of the desert campaigns. Impeccably academic direction and a genuine response to the setting, but the whole thing has rather the air of a blockbuster in search of a hero. (Peter O'Toole, Alec Guinness, Jack Hawkins, Anthony Quinn. Technicolor, Super Panavision 70.)
- ***LONGEST DAY, THE** (*Fox*) Solemnly spectacular reconstruction of the D-Day invasion of Europe. A host of stars—American, British, French and German—appear fleetingly, but with Darryl Zanuck as commander in chief, only a handful get hurt. (Directors, Ken Annakin, Andrew Marton, Bernhard Wicki. CinemaScope.)
- MIND BENDERS, THE** (*Warner-Pathé*) Brainwashing in Oxford, with Dirk Bogarde Jekyll and Hyding as an uxorious physiologist who is put through it by M.I.5 and persuaded that he hates his wife. Wild scripting by James Kennaway leaves the director, Basil Dearden, panting to keep up. (Mary Ure, John Clements.)
- ***MUTINY ON THE BOUNTY** (*M-G-M*) Directionless, in every sense, remake of Frank Lloyd's old film. Trevor Howard makes Bligh a believably obsessed, class-conscious puritan; Brando's Fletcher Christian rocks the boat with an often funny but over-indulgent impression of an aristocratic fop. (Richard Harris; director, Lewis Milestone. Technicolor, Ultra Panavision 70.)
- NINE HOURS TO RAMA** (*Fox*) Blood and thunder, tempestuous love, Pe ter Sellers accents and gangster machinations around poor Gandhi's assassination. A moment of truth in J. S. Casshyap's moving portrayal of Gandhi. (Horst Buchholz, Jose Ferrer, Valerie Gearon; director, Mark Robson. DeLuxe Color, CinemaScope.)
- ****PERIOD OF ADJUSTMENT** (*M-G-M*) Tennessee Williams' wicked puncturing of the American dream of lusty manhood, married bliss and status symbols, adapted from the play as a sort of chamber film. Sharp, intimate, static, beautifully acted. Jane Fonda quite splendid. (Jim Hutton, Tony Franciosa, Lois Nettleton; director, George Roy Hill. Panavision.) *Reviewed.*
- POUPEE, LA** (*Sebricon*) Crazy revolution in South America, with erotic heroine (and her scientifically-created doll-double) played by female impersonator Sonne Teal, and Cybulski parodying Cybulski as dictator and chief revolutionary. All stirred into a surreal mess by director Jacques Baratier. (Catherine Milinaire, Jacques Dufilho. Eastman Colour, Franscope.) *Reviewed.*
- SON OF FLUBBER** (*Walt Disney*) Too many plot complications spoil this sequel to *The Absent-Minded Professor*, but when Fred MacMurray unleashes his flubbergassed football players on the rival team both game and special effects become nicely airborne. (Nancy Olson, Keenan Wynn, Tommy Kirk; director, Robert Stevenson.)
- ****SPARROWS CAN'T SING** (*Warner-Pathé*) Stephen Lewis' play about London's East Enders, directed by Joan Littlewood much as she did it on the stage: bouncy, jolly, uninhibited. Albert Chevalier and Marie Lloyd would have recognised these perky sparrers. (James Booth, Barbara Windsor, Roy Kinnear.) *Reviewed.*
- SWORDSMAN OF SIENA** (*M-G-M*) Handsome, fearless adventurer Stewart Granger swashbuckles Spanish oppressors out of 16th century Siena and pretty Sylva Koscina into his arms. Somewhat sluggish. (Christine Kaufmann, Riccardo Garrone; director, Etienne Perier. Eastman Colour, CinemaScope.)
- ***TALES OF TERROR** (*Warner-Pathé*) Bodies mummified, burnt or walled up alive, mesmerised into catalepsy and then liquefied. Three Poe-Corman stories for the price of one, with Vincent Price, Peter Lorre and Basil Rathbone savouring their healthily mock-Gothic flavour. (Debra Paget. Pathé Color, Panavision.)
- ******THIS SPORTING LIFE** (*Rank*) Hopeless love affair between a rugby footballer and his widowed landlady, driven towards tragedy by her refusal to meet his emotional demands and his inability to express them. A film of passionate conviction, living up to everyone's hopes and taking the new British realism a long stride forward. (Richard Harris, Rachel Roberts; director, Lindsay Anderson.) *Reviewed.*
- ****TRIAL OF JOAN OF ARC** (*Sebricon*) Bresson films the Trial's questions and answers straight. Some may find it dehydrated history with austerity ousting passion; others will respond to the cumulative tension of the method; all will be shattered by the last five minutes at the stake. (Florence Carrez, Jean-Claude Fourneau.)
- ***TWO FOR THE SEESAW** (*United Artists*) Faithful adaptation having all the limitations of William Gibson's sentimental play, plus an ear-shattering score. Shirley MacLaine's warm and witty performance is perhaps a little soft at the edges but it holds the film together. Robert Mitchum is miscast as her vacillating lover. (Edmon Ryan, Elizabeth Fraser; director, Robert Wise. Panavision.) *Reviewed.*
- WARRIOR'S REST** (*Gala*) A few touches of Vadim erotica can't save this saga, mainly banal, sometimes ludicrous, of a drunken thug's schooling of a prim girl in the pleasures of sex. (Brigitte Bardot, Robert Hossein, James Robertson Justice. Eastman Colour, Franscope.)
- ****WEST SIDE STORY** (*United Artists*) Strikingly mounted version of the Broadway musical which fails to bridge the gap between realistic backgrounds and Hollywood social rage, between dramatic dancing and tired echoes of Romeo and Juliet, between—in fact—theme and form. Fine playing by George Chakiris, Richard Beymer and Rita Moreno. (Natalie Wood, Russ Tamblyn; directors, Robert Wise, Jerome Robbins. Technicolor, Panavision 70.)
- ****WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO BABY JANE?** (*Warner-Pathé*) Robert Aldrich's enterprise in getting Davis and Crawford to star for him pays off. Opportunistic film-making, but with Joan suffering and Bette tormenting as the weird sisters of a Hollywood nightmare satisfaction of a kind is guaranteed. (Victor Buono, Anna Lee.)
- WHO'S GOT THE ACTION?** (*Paramount*) Lana Turner trying to recoup husband Dean Martin's gambling losses by booking his bets herself, and forced to sell up house and home to pay his winnings. Lavish, mildly witty; long pauses between jokes. (Eddie Albert; director, Daniel Mann. Technicolor, Panavision.)
- *****WRONG ARM OF THE LAW, THE** (*BLC/British Lion*) Gangsters and police joining forces to defeat un-English activities of Australian crooks who assume police disguise to rob the robbers. Fast, furiously funny, Goonishly scripted, brilliantly directed. (Peter Sellers, Lionel Jeffries, Bernard Cribbins; director, Cliff Owen.) *Reviewed.*

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